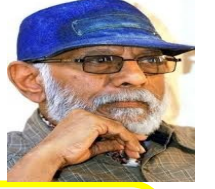
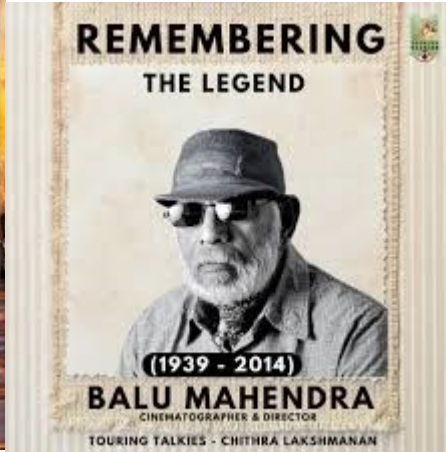


Book Version of the PhD Thesis submitted to
Dr MGR Educational and Research Institute



EXPLORING THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN BALU MAHENDRA'S TAMIL FILMS *AN AUTEURISTIC APPROACH*



Department of Visual Communication and Animation

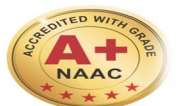


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Assistant Professor
Department of Visual Communication and Animation



Department of Visual Communication and Animation

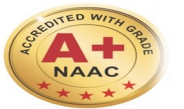


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**EXPLORING THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN
IN BALU MAHENDRA'S TAMIL FILMS
AN AUTEURISTIC APPROACH**

A THESIS

Submitted by

ALICE RUFINA F

*in partial fulfillment for the award of the degree
of*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY



**Department of Visual Communication and Animation
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SCIENCES**

Dr. M.G.R.

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ABSTRACT

One of the most widely used forms of entertainment in the world is films. An enormous number of films are made every year and there are also a lot of viewers. Films are aptly referred to as the mirror of society, as their cinematography reflects the true truth of society. Consequently, Views on gender, caste and creed are significantly shaped by movies. Numerous studies conducted on how women or gender are portrayed in films. But very few were done in Tamil Cinema especially on films directed by legendary Director, Cinematographer & Editor Balu Mahendra. This study fills the gap by investigates the representation of women protagonists in the films of Balu Mahendra, one of Tamil cinema's most influential auteur filmmakers.

By employing a mixed-method approach primarily Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) supplemented by In-Depth Interviews with actors and collaborators this research provides a comprehensive understanding of how women are written, visualized and integrated into cinematic narratives in his films. In Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA), the primary variables studied are representation of women protagonist physically, their costumes, scene representation, character development, Representation of other women characters in the film, Moral Values, Cultural Values and Role and Reflection of the society in films. Totally 16 films directed by Balu Mahendra in Tamil was taken for the analysis. In In-Depth interview method five artists worked with Balu Mahendra was interviewed and tested the important variables such as opinion on Balu Mahendra as an Auteur, importance given to the roles in Balu Mahendra Films, experience in acting in the Balu Mahendra and other director films, significance of Women Characters in Balu Mahendra Films, acting or performance inputs from Balu Mahendras, gender balance by Balu Mahendra and suggestion for present artists in Tamil Film Industry.

The findings reveal a strong emphasis on realism and authenticity in the portrayal of female characters. The majority of protagonists are portrayed as housewives or students, reflecting domesticity and youth-centered narratives. Few characters are professionals, indicating a limited but diverse occupational representation. Most women are shown speaking in neutral Tamil dialects, with minimal deviation into regional or English slang. A notable observation is Balu Mahendra's consistent casting of dark-skinned, tall women challenging long standing Tamil cinema beauty norms and his preference for minimal makeup and traditional clothing to preserve cultural realism.

Characters are deeply analyzed, revealing a spectrum ranging from flat arcs (where protagonists remain emotionally consistent and influence their surroundings) to transformative, positive and fall arcs, demonstrating personal growth, resilience or decline. Characters like Thulasi (across multiple films), Sudha (Veedu) and Rekha (Moodu Pani) showcase distinct journeys shaped by love, trauma or social challenges. While many female characters exhibit strength, independence and emotional depth, others are vulnerable, naive or emotionally dependent indicating Balu Mahendra's commitment to portraying women as multidimensional human beings rather than idealized stereotypes.

Aesthetic representation is another key finding. From hairstyles and costumes to jewelry and makeup, women characters reflect the socio-economic context, narrative setting (urban/rural) and character development. The films blend traditional and modern styles, indicating an evolving yet rooted visual language. The inclusion of secondary female characters across various roles from dancers and sex workers to mothers and students - further deepens the film's social fabric.

Insights from In-Depth interviews with actors and close collaborators

reaffirm Balu Mahendra's reputation as a "visual poet" and a pioneer of realistic filmmaking. Interviewees highlighted his auteur approach writing, directing, editing and cinematography all under his personal control. His unique directorial method encouraged subtle, internalized acting, often requiring actors to become the character rather than perform. Female actors particularly emphasized the empowering experience of working with him, citing how his characters often reflected ordinary women with extraordinary emotional depth and dignity.

The study concludes that Balu Mahendra's cinema presents a radical departure from mainstream Tamil film narratives, especially in terms of gender representation. His women protagonists are not confined to romantic subplots or ornamental roles; instead, they are agents of emotional, social and moral inquiry. Films like *Veedu*, *Moondram Pirai*, *Marupadiyum* and *Sathi Leelavathi* reveal complex female subjectivities that challenge societal expectations and cinematic tropes. The results affirm that Balu Mahendra's legacy lies not only in his mastery of visual storytelling but also in his progressive, sensitive and deeply human portrayal of women making his work a timeless template for gender conscious filmmaking in Indian cinema.

Keywords: Cinema, Auteur, Representation, Balu Mahendra, Gender.



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CHAPTER - 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Cinema

Creativity, invention and social change are all intertwined throughout the fascinating history of cinema. The history of cinema, from its modest beginnings as silent black and white pictures to its grand, technologically sophisticated productions, reflects the dynamic relationship between art, technology and culture. In addition to reflecting the shifting currents of culture, cinema has been instrumental in forming and influencing cultural viewpoints. An important part of this historical voyage is the development of technology. Every technical advance, from the invention of sound in the 1920s to the arrival of color, widescreen formats and digital technologies, has not only increased the scope for narrative but also influenced the visual language of film.

1.2 Cinema And Society

Cinema has the unique power to mold and reflect the values, beliefs and ideologies of the civilizations that develop and watch it since it is both an art form and an entertainment medium. Cinema serves as a mirror, expressing the social reality of the time while evoking complex political, social and cultural contexts. Viewers are introduced to a variety of viewpoints on societal issues like race, gender, class and identity through cinematic storylines. Additionally, movies can shape societal attitudes and behavior. Film's emotional and visual power can sway public opinion, spark movements and even propel societal change. When it comes to vital causes like women's rights, environmental disasters and civil rights movements, movies have been a key tool for energizing communities and spreading awareness. Cinema can also serve as a propaganda tool, reinforcing prejudices and promoting preconceptions while illustrating the tension between artistic expression and social control.

The creation, distribution and consumption of films have changed in the last several decades due to rapid technical advancement and media globalization. With the emergence of internet platforms, filmmaking has become more accessible, giving voice to a wider range of viewpoints and upending long-standing conventions in the field. These changes have sparked conversations about the role of cinema in an increasingly globalized society and its future.

1.3 Indian Cinema

Indian cinema, with its kaleidoscope tapestry of storylines, music, dance and vibrant images, is a cultural phenomenon that crosses borders and connects with viewers all over the world. The history of Indian film is a fascinating story set against the backdrop of a rich and multifaceted country. From the pioneering works of Dadasaheb Phalke, commonly regarded as the father of Indian cinema, to the golden age of the 1950s and 1960s and the global dominance of Bollywood today, Indian cinema has had a fascinating journey (Sharma 2014). Cinema in India is more than just a form of entertainment; it is also a cultural mirror, reflecting the complexity, customs and aspirations of a diverse nation. The influence of provincial cinemas, parallel film movements and the development of new voices add layers of complexity to the story, transforming Indian cinema into a dynamic and ever-changing cultural force.

1.4 Tamil Cinema

The film industry of Tamil Nadu, also known as Kollywood, boasts a prominent and powerful heritage that goes back to the dawn of the 20th century. Tamil cinema serves as a cultural mirror that captures the customs, goals and social dynamics of Tamil Nadu. It captures the colorful spirit of Tamil Nadu, India, with its intricate storyline, music and images. Tamil cinema has had an incredible transformation, making a lasting impression on the cultural landscape, from its modest beginnings in the early 20th century to its current position as a major force in the worldwide film industry. Tamil cinema has passed through a wide range of genres, themes and technological improvements, from the groundbreaking work of R. Nataraja Mudaliar's silent film "KeechakaVadham" in 1918 to the worldwide triumph of modern blockbusters (Shanmugavel 2018).

The first talking motion picture, Kalidas, was released on October 31, 1931 (Mai and Kumar 2020). It was launched in the same month as the AlamAra launch. Through the years, Tamil films became a powerful cultural force in itself, bringing together entertainment with social, political and ideological themes. Tamil cinema was also instrumental in molding Tamil identity, especially during the Dravidian movement, with films serving as a platform for anti-caste, rationalist and regional pride discourses seen through the works of individuals such as C.N. Annadurai and M. Karunanidhi, who moved from scriptwriting to politics.

During post-independence years, filmmakers such as K. Balachander, Bharathiraja and Balu Mahendra reconfigured the thematic and aesthetic sensibilities of Tamil cinema with realism, empowered female protagonists and socially conscious subjects. Subsequently, auteurs such as Mani Ratnam combined commercial and art cinema, taking Tamil cinema to international audiences. Tamil cinema remains important today both at home and abroad, creating award winning films concerning themes related to caste, gender, class and modernity. Its history is not only a chronology of movies but a reflection of Tamil society its struggles, hopes and cultural evolution making it a vital component of Indian and world cinema.

1.5 Women In Indian Cinema

Women's portrayal in cinema has a significant impact on cultural views, standards and goals. From the silent era to modern blockbusters, women in film have been both a reflection of the changing social fabric and forceful in questioning established narratives. Indian films are closely linked to the country's culture and a wide range of cultural aspects have an impact on how women are portrayed. In stories that range from classic family dramas to stories delving into urban complexity, women's representation reflects cultural norms, customs and the modern realities of a multicultural and dynamic country. Historically, women in Indian films have frequently been constrained to conventional roles, maintaining limiting notions of femininity. However, with the advent of feminist movements and shifting social paradigms, filmmakers have increasingly sought to question and subvert these stereotypes by telling stories that examine the depth and diversity of women's lives in films. Women in films evolve from mere trappings to

powerful protagonists, from one-dimensional archetypes to multifaceted humans negotiating life's complexities (Rathod 2020).

The representation of women in Indian cinema goes well beyond the characters we see on screen. It includes the decisions made by filmmakers, screenwriters and industry stakeholders, which reflect the dominant ideas, biases and goals of the moment. This investigation not only examines the image of women in films but also addresses the views and viewpoints of the creative brains behind the camera that help shape these narratives. Films are not generated in a vacuum; they are intricately linked to the societal circumstances in which they develop. Contemporary discussions about women's representation in films go beyond critique to include themes of empowerment, intersectionality and advocacy.

Even though there have been significant advancements for women in Indian cinema, there are still issues. Topics include gender inequality and stereotyping scarce opportunities on and off the screen. Nevertheless, as performers and filmmakers push for diversity, inclusivity and more complex portrayals of women, the industry is seeing a tide of change. Talks about women in Indian cinema now cover topics like empowerment, intersectionality and social commentary in addition to creative criticism. (Pradeep 2016).

1.6 Representation of Women in Tamil Cinema

Tamil cinema sets out on a cultural voyage, exploring the creative, historical and social factors that have influenced the varied and dynamic portrayal of women in films. Women have been shown in Tamil cinema as captivating their transformational journeys reflect the socio-cultural dynamics of Tamil Nadu. Women in Tamil films have also reflected and shaped changing storylines, from the captivating heroines of classic Tamil cinema to the modern protagonists shattering social conventions.

During the early days of Tamil filmmaking, a handful of extraordinary women came to be recognized as the leading edge women actors of the silent film era. The silver screen was graced by actresses like T.P. Rajalakshmi and M.S. Subbulakshmi, who helped establish Tamil cinema in its early years and paved the way for later generations of female

performers. Actresses like Sujatha and Lakshmi brought a fresh perspective to Tamil cinema, portraying a variety of roles beyond traditional archetypes. The introduction of talkies added a new element to storytelling and the first female actors made a smooth transition from silent frames to spoken narratives. Women like Padmini and B. Saroja Devi became legendary characters due to their ability to adjust to the changing dynamics of Tamil films as well as their engaging performances. The early female actors in Tamil cinema had to make their way through archaic roles steeped in cultural norms. They were the epitome of what it meant to be a Tamil woman heroines.

The image of women in Tamil cinema has evolved significantly throughout the years, reflecting greater social upheavals in Tamil Nadu and India as a whole. From the early days of cinema, when women were often depicted in traditional roles confined to the domestic sphere, to contemporary films that explore women's struggles for autonomy and empowerment, Tamil cinema provides a lens through which to understand the changing dynamics of gender relations. However, the portrayal of women's living conditions in Tamil cinema is not without conflicts and controversy. While some films have praised strong, independent female characters who defy patriarchal standards, others have reinforced stereotypes that contribute to gender inequality. The contrast between progressive tales and regressive portrayals raises crucial considerations concerning cinema's role in challenging or reinforcing societal norms governing women's roles and rights.

Instead of being restricted to stereotypical roles, female characters are given diverse, unique and agency-filled positions. Filmmakers are examining many aspects of women's existence, whether in rural stories or dramas with an urban focus. It's becoming increasingly common to see strong, independent female leads that actively contribute to the plot and move the plot along. These characters frequently defy social standards by displaying courage, resiliency and the capacity to make their own decisions. Socially relevant subjects, such as women's empowerment, gender equality and societal expectations, are covered in a lot of modern Tamil films. Filmmakers are advocating for good change and bringing attention to the difficulties encountered by women by using their platforms. The way relationships are portrayed in Tamil cinema has changed, showing

more complex and realistic interactions between male and female characters. To provide a more genuine portrayal of women's experiences, filmmakers are delving into the subtleties of friendships, sexual relationships and familial ties. A deliberate attempt is made to depart from the traditional clichés connected to women in films. These days, female characters aren't confined to supporting or romantic parts; instead, women play important roles in the plot and are crucial to the story.

Films with a strong female lead cast, where the female leads drive the whole story, have become more prevalent. These films explore a variety of genres, from thriller to drama, giving women a chance to show off their flexibility. The need for inclusive storytelling which includes highlighting the stories of women from various backgrounds, occupations and age groups is becoming increasingly apparent. This development helps to make Tamil cinema's portrayal of women more realistic and all encompassing.

Even if Tamil cinema has given rise to well-known female characters, problems still exist such as misconceptions, limited possibilities and gender inequities. Actresses showed incredible fortitude in overcoming obstacles such as societal expectations and industry prejudices. However, a change towards more complex and empowering depictions is indicated by the tenacity of actors, directors and the younger generation. Talks about women in Tamil films today cover topics like empowerment, intersectionality and cultural commentary in addition to creative criticism. The stories centered on women in Tamil cinema evolved into more nuanced, multifaceted representations of society as we moved into the digital era. In addition to giving life to a variety of storylines, actresses are utilizing their platforms to challenge stereotypes, promote gender equality and engage in public discourse. Filmmakers are also working for more nuanced representations of women and equitable opportunities.

1.7 Balu Mahendra – An Overview

Balu Mahendra is a very well-known Cinematographer, Film Maker, Editor and Actor in the Indian film industry. He was born in Sri Lanka on 20th May 1939. He was more interested and associated with exploring the human experience, visual poetry and transformative storytelling. He has worked in more than 60 films as a cinematographer and

he is one of the renowned cinematographers in the Indian film industry. Before making his directing debut with the highly regarded Tamil film "Kokila" in 1977, Balu Mahendra started his career as a cinematographer and developed his craft behind the lens. Balu Mahendra's career took off after that, distinguished by an abundance of work spanning genres, languages and cinematic settings. A tribute to his ability to capture the refinements of society and the complexities of human relationships, Balu Mahendra's films range from the moving depiction of domestic life in "Veedu" to the evocative storytelling of "Moondram Pirai". Balu Mahendra's influence may be seen in his work as a screenwriter, editor and cinematographer in addition to his directing endeavors. His achievements in the technical areas of filmmaking and his partnerships with well-known directors serve to further establish his reputation as a versatile artist in the Indian film industry. Balu Mahendra became a trendsetter in Indian filmmaking and made a lasting impression with his imaginative storytelling, striking images and complex character development.

1.7.1 Notable Directorial Works of Balu Mahendra

Balu Mahendra has directed 16 films in Tamil Language. Before his filmmaking started, he began his career as a cinematographer and established himself well. Kokila was the first movie directed by Balu Mahendra in 1977. It was a Kannada-language movie and the realistic script and photography received good can.

In 1979, he directed the first Tamil movie Azhiyatha Kolangal, considered one of his best efforts. 1980 saw the premiere of Moodu Pani, a psychological thriller renowned for its gripping story and technical mastery. Moondram Pirai, one of his best-known Tamil movies, is a heartwarming story of love that debuted in 1982. In 1983, it was also concurrently dubbed in Hindi as Sadma. Veedu is a 1988 Tamil film that realistically depicts the challenges of the middle class, with a special emphasis on a woman's will to build a house. In 1995 comedy-drama Sathi Leelavathi was well received for its humor and storytelling technique. In 1987, Rettai Vaal Kuruvi was made as a happy romantic comedy that showcases his range as a director. In 2003 psychological thriller Julie Ganapathy was released based on the inspiration of Stephen King's novel Misery.

1.7.2 Women in Balu Mahendra Films

Legendary Indian Director & Cinematographer Balu Mahendra was renowned for his sensitive character portrayals and distinctive storytelling approach. He explored many aspects of women's lives in several of his films, giving them depth and sincerity. Women were shown in Balu Mahendra's films in a realistic and nuanced manner. He designs with complex personalities, strengths, weaknesses and talents. Balu Mahendra was particularly skilled at exploring the inner lives of his female characters. His narratives evoke strong emotions as he skillfully conveys the subtleties of their relationships, conflicts and feelings.

A number of his films had strong female leads that overcame obstacles and made decisions that shaped their personas. Balu Mahendra showed off women from all backgrounds as they moved fluidly between rural and urban environments. His films included an array of varied female characters, experiencing a range of relationship patterns, encompassing friendships, parent-child interactions and relationships between spouses. His films frequently explored the subtleties and complexity of these relationships, providing a multi layered representation of women in many capacities. Balu Mahendra, a former cameraman who became a director, was known for his sensitive use of images to express stories.

Balu Mahendra also frequently handled the conflict between traditional ideals and contemporary goals in his films. His female characters occasionally found themselves torn between these opposing realities, which gave the story more nuance. It is noteworthy that He produced a variety of films, each of which presented a distinct viewpoint on the portrayal of women. His films are timeless masterpieces in Indian cinema because of his remarkable ability to convey the core of human interactions and emotions.

1.7.3 Awards and Recognitions of Balu Mahendra

Balu Mahendra exemplifies the power of storytelling and artistic expression in four film industries, including Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu and Hindi. He has worked as a cinematographer in 54 films, a director in 24 and an editor in 20 films. In addition to leaving an indelible effect on spectators, his contributions to the film business have received numerous awards and accolades from critics. He has received numerous

international, national and state-level awards for his work. He has received four National film awards for his Best Cinematography works for the films Nelli, Prayanam, Chuvanna Sandhyakal, Kokila and Moondram Pirai. He has received a National Award for Best Screenplay for the film Moondram Pirai and the Best Feature Film Award for the film Veedu (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 National & State Awards won by Balu Mahendra

Movie Name	Released Year	Category of Award	Language
Nellu	1974	Cinematography	Malayalam
Prayanam, ChuvannaSandhyakal	1975	Cinematography	Malayalam
Kokila	1977	Cinematography	Kannada
Moondram Pirai	1982	Cinematography	Tamil
Moondram Pirai	1982	Screenplay	Tamil
Veedu	1987	Best Regional Film	Tamil
Sandhya Ragam	1989	Best film on family welfare	Tamil
Vanna Vanna Pookal	1991	Best Feature film	Tamil
Thalaimuraigal	2013	Best Feature Film on National Integration	Tamil
Moondram Pirai	1982	Best Director – Tamil Nadu State Award	Tamil

Balu Mahendra also got National awards for his films such as Sandhya Ragam under the Best Film in the Family Welfare category, Vanna Vanna Pookal in the Best Feature Film category and Thalaimuraigal in the Best Feature Film in the National Integration category. He has won the Tamil Nadu State Award for his movie Moondram Pirai which was released in 1982. Apart from this, Balu Mahendra's films were featured and awarded in many international film festivals, particularly for their cinematography and direction, which brought global attention to Tamil Cinema.

1.8 Statement of the Problem

The representation of women in Indian cinema has been an important subject of discourse particularly in Cinema where the women characters are often shown through a stereotypical, patriarchal lens either as ideal figures or marginalized (Gokulsing and Dissanayake 2004). Most of the interrogations are also based on the feminist theoretical approach with limited scholarly work based on auteur theory.

Balu Mahendra is well known for his films celebrated for poetic realism, intimate narratives and distinctive visual aesthetics. He also mainly focuses on women protagonists and emotionally layered women characters that invite a very deep attention to how gender is constructed and conveyed in his cinematic vision. Though Balu Mahendra's work is analyzed based on psychological depth & autonomy (Baskaran 1996), there remains a gap in analyzing the representation of women in his films through auteur theory. Since the auteur theory emphasizes the director's influence over films in styling and thematic elements, this can be considered a suitable framework for understanding the portrayal of women across his films. The lack of systematic academic inquiry into his female representations, especially in the context of Tamil cinema's broader gender politics, underscores the need for a focused study. This gap creates a space that requires closer theory driven investigation into the ways women are represented in films.

1.9 Need For The Study

The need for the study comes from both a theoretical and contextual gap found in the existing literary works.

Balu Mahendra is an auteur par excellence. His multiple decade cinematic odyssey demonstrates both a mastery of the medium and a deep comprehension of the human condition. His work goes beyond traditional narrative, providing a singular fusion of visual poetry, emotional resonance and perceptive examination of the human condition. The dedication to storytelling that Balu Mahendra has shown throughout his career as a filmmaker extends beyond the level. From his breakthrough picture "Kokila" to the intensely felt "Moondram Pirai" and the socially conscious "Veedu", Balu Mahendra's body of work demonstrates a deep interest in the intricacies of interpersonal connections and

existence. Balu Mahendra's capacity to distill the essence of the human experience through his lens is one of the important elements that are being examined. While there are critical commentary is available on gender representation in Balu Mahendra films, it is not explored in the academic discourse. His directorial work across decades that provides an examination of authorship and gender representation is also not studied.

Furthermore, with a growing interest in understanding the inclusive and diversified portrayal of gender in Indian films, this research on how Balu Mahendra's authorial presence influenced the depiction of women in his film would provide a literary understanding, contribution to film theory and gender studies. Hence this research seeks to critically explore the representation of women in Balu Mahendra's Tamil films through an auteuristic approach.

1.10 Aim of the Study

The study aims to understand the representation of women in Balu Mahendra Films as an Auteur.

1.11 Objectives of the Study

- To identify the representation of women in Balu Mahendra's Tamil films
- To analyze the evolution and trends with respect to the representations of women in Balu Mahendra's Tamil films
- To examine the perspective of sexuality, stereotypes, ethnicity and characterization of women protagonists in Balu Mahendra Tamil films
- To explore the narrative conventions in constructing women's identity in Balu Mahendra's Tamil films
- To investigate the viewpoints of his artists and directors in influencing the representation of women in Balu Mahendra's Tamil films

1.12 Operational Definition

Representation

The act of displaying an illustration of something to convey concepts or to narrate a narrative (Benshoff and Griffin 2004).

Stereotype

The surface level perceptions about a particular group within a given community (Kanahara 2006).

Tamil Cinema

The term denotes the film industry of Tamil Nadu.

Tamil movies

The motion pictures created in the Tamil language and in Tamil Nadu for cinema exhibition.

Empowerment

Authority over Resources and Ideology (Batliwala 1994).

1.13 Chapterization

Chapter 1: The first chapter provides an introduction and explains the significance of the research. This introductory chapter discusses the introduction to cinema and its reflection on society. The chapter also discusses a summary of Indian Cinema, Tamil Cinema and the role & representation of women in Tamil Cinema. The chapter also discusses a brief description of Balu Mahendra and his contributions to Tamil Cinema as a director. Furthermore, the statement of the problem, need for the study, aim, objectives and operational definition are also explained.

Chapter 2: This chapter provides a survey of pertinent literature on the representation of women in cinema. The literature review outlines and creates a valid argument based on study implications, as well as establishes the background and reason for this research to support the research topic and questions.

Chapter 3: This chapter describes the study strategy and acceptable methodologies for investigating the research problem. The various and mixed approaches, which include the quantitative and qualitative phases of ethnographic content analysis and in-depth interviews, are well characterized. This chapter also provides the theoretical underpinning

for the investigation. The theoretical framework establishes interrelated concepts and theories of representation, stereotype and male gaze, as well as a conceptual understanding of the problem, measurement and theoretical links in research.

Chapter 4: In Chapter Four, the research discusses the results of the ethnographic content analysis focusing on the portrayal of women in Balu Mahendra's Tamil films. It also covers the in-depth interview results conducted with experts such as actresses and film directors.

Chapter 5: Chapter five includes the presentation of the discussions and major research findings of ethnographic content analysis and in-depth interview method.

Chapter 6: Chapter six contains the conclusions, limitations and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER - 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Overview

This chapter presents a summary of the literature analyzed to support this study. The literature survey results are presented based on categories such as women and film, women representation in global, Indian, Tamil films and Balu Mahendra films. The implications of the literature review are also presented to show the overall contribution of literature in this specific area of the study.

2.2 Women and Media

Media play a crucial role in bringing about social transformation and change. Any society's value system is reflected in the media's content. The way topics of women are covered by the media reveals the general mindset of society. Intentionally or not, the way women have been depicted in the media has not always reflected reality and is an exaggerated version of events and presumptions from real life (Kumari 2013). The reason for concern is that it significantly influences the way of life of today's teenagers, who mimic and identify with the characters in printed or electronic media content. The media's stereotypical portrayal of gender roles serves to perpetuate teenager's perceptions of gender, which are based on conventional patriarchal ideas (Kumari 2013). Without question, the media has a significant impact on people and maybe a powerful tool for promoting gender equality and improving the status of women in society today.

However, stereotypes about women and their social duties are being reinforced by the media. The majority of news about women reports on the tragedies and injustices that befall them demonstrating the media's insensitivity to gender. It is therefore that the media assume responsibility for serving as a potent tool for bringing about social change that will benefit women.

The media can be used to replace the stereotypically passive, traditional image of women that is ingrained in society at large with an accurate and positive representation of women (Kataria and Pandey 2014). The media's role is vital in bringing about a shift in women's status, which can be brought about by society's favorable and encouraging attitude. Therefore, women's perceptions must be changed from those of passive observers and recipients to those of proactive achievers and doers (Kumari and Joshi 2015).

2.3 Women And Cinema

The most popular mass media for public communication is film and theatre. Cinema assumes a crucial dimension as a humanistic discourse that has the power to reroute the cultural and material fabric of our everyday lives since it is a mediator of societal realities and personal hopes, collective issues and individual goals (Jain and Rai 2009). Cinema is an extremely impressionistic medium, so it must serve as a tool for challenging preconceived notions and fostering empathy for differing realities (Nandakumar 2011).

Movies are the amazing breakthrough that has impacted human life with a success rate and quickness never seen before. The love of films stems from the need to escape reality, to witness something novel and unlikely and to laugh and weep over other people's tragedies rather than your own. These needs are met by the movie in a straightforward, striking, picturesque and essential manner. Cinema not only entertains but also shapes ideas, creates fantasies and challenges dominant cultural values. Cinema has a significant role in defining Indian culture throughout the country (Rathod 2020). Several studies have explored women's roles in various countries. In the same way, Indian cinema has made significant progress in portraying women in films over the past few decades.

In sociological studies, the representation of social and historical practices involving gender approach through the medium of film is an important phenomenon. One may argue that gender socialization and the development of gender ideology depend heavily on the media. The materials we use to form our identities, sense of self, ethnicity, race, nationality, sexual orientation and divisions between "us" and "them" are products of media culture (Dines and Humez 2003).

Feminist cinema theory demonstrated that films manufacture meaning, rather than reflecting social interactions. Cinema purposely creates sexual and gender differences. In movies, only male characters are portrayed, with no representation of female characters even in minor roles. Feminist cinema theory criticized stereotyped representation in films, which merits a special note. It criticized stereotypical representations and emphasized the importance of representing female desire and subjectivity. This notion played a significant role in shaping a feminist audience for cinema (Pareek 2016).

Mulvey (1975) argued in an essay that films should be viewed as more than just entertainment and literature and should be approached holistically, including concerns about its creation and reception. Even after five decades, her thoughts remain pertinent. Mulvey stated in the 20th century that cinema mostly serves men's visual enjoyment. According to the speaker, women in cinemas are often subjected to the male gaze (Harikrishnan, Kanath and Sreelakshmi 2021).

Gender studies and feminist cinema theories place a strong emphasis on the representation of women and gender in film, including the work of female filmmakers. For many years there has been a persistent underrepresentation of women in film. Women and minorities must be represented in the media because people need to see themselves reflected in the stories they read and watch. Young girls ought to be exposed to complex, well-written characters who can stand alone without the help of a guy or anybody else. Society's perception of women will probably be badly impacted by the underrepresentation. According to the analysis, women still mostly play the same roles that they did thirty years ago. Although the number of women has increased and their responsibilities have improved, there is still much work to be done to address the traditional roles that women are often assigned (Crudden 2017).

At times the representation of women in films reflects the realities of women's lives in a stereotypical manner. In such a case people's perceptions of society may be altered and a greater awareness of the social and cultural issues faced by women can be created by showcasing the agency and empowerment of women on screen. Given how easily

discrimination is internalized as cultural beliefs, it is essential to break through this barrier through cultural action and educational interventions (Rad 2016).

Because of unfavorable stereotyping and a lack of female contribution, women's representation in the media and their place within media power structures are recurrent concerns in every community. These factors both reflect and perpetuate broader gender inequities. The way that women are portrayed in culture and society is perpetuated by films, which is the most efficient way to do so (Jackson and Jones 1998; Namitha 2021).

Since the 2000s, there has been considerable growth in the number of female directors, exceeding the previous decade. The study found that women directors were able to enter the film industry due to technological advancements, increased public funding for low- budget independent productions and a growing women's movement. In the 2000s, half of the films made by female directors were classified as 'women films', while the other half fell within the genres of popular or art house cinema due to market forces (Tanriover 2016).

Yang, Xu and Luo (2020) emphasized the challenges faced by women in the film business, both in the production and distribution processes. The study found that female filmmakers, particularly screenwriters, play an important role in improving female representation in films. Films that depict incisive stories about women frequently have smaller budgets, leading to increased criticism.

In India, the policy of representing women as important female protagonists began in popular Bollywood films (Pichanota and Bhatnagarb 2021). Now the trend started showing women in modern films are often self-sufficient, confident and career-oriented. They strike a balance between modern feminism and traditional traditions (Sharma 2019).

But even in the 21st century, some 'dark' minds still view women as 'merely women'. Some individuals may be unaware of the advancements achieved by women in various fields or they may actively avoid learning about them. It's important to address vulgar depictions and cheap jokes about women. Puns and sexual content are prevalent in 'New Generation

Movies' released after 2010. However, its preceding decade is not too far distant in this regard.

2.4 Women Representation In Films

To achieve gender equity in films, many production studios worldwide must address the top of the pyramid. Women have more opportunities to be leaders. It's especially challenging when many individuals are ignorant of the disparity in representation (Mays 2021; Sharma 2023).

Classic fairy tales often feature a beautiful princess with an angelic heart, a handsome prince on a white horse and a happily ever after. The famous fairy tale's narrative portrays women through feminine tropes. On the other side, the tales depict traditional conventions of women, including an infatuation with natural beauty, misconceptions about ambition and marriage, as the solution to their issues (Berlianti 2021).

In Hollywood cinema, minority groups continue to face unequal chances. Though women's roles have progressed slowly, this has resulted in less developed female characters than expected. The inclusion of an actor behind the scenes significantly impacts good portrayals of women (Kunsey 2018).

Film portrayals of elderly women often marginalize them based on both their age and gender. Traditional mass communication tactics assume audiences see pictures and representations in the media as literal and out of context, rather than as fictionalized or symbolic. These theories assume a direct causal link between media visuals, representations and audience views about social reality (Dhar 2019).

Women are often portrayed as peripheral, maternal or romantic characters who seek adventure and need to be rescued. Feminine types of rescuing feature female protagonists who use their sexuality, compassion, empathy and maternal instincts to save others. Some female characters still rescue utilizing physical strength, cerebral skills and positions of authority (Nulman 2013).

Movies perpetuate gender stereotypes and reflect the customary contexts of women's roles and subjectivities in society (Birikorang and Donkor 2014). Two methods are used in women's representation. Women are frequently shown as the objects of male desire and possible possession in a variety of presentation genres in social and cultural activities (Rad 2016). Film portrayals of career-centric women highlight negative stereotypes such as nasty and deceitful characters, promiscuity, alienation, lack of closeness and difficulty balancing work and family responsibilities (Ezzedeen 2015).

Critics who argue that action/adventure films encourage hyper-masculinity should avoid them or not watch them should not be the solution. Pursuing representations that more faithfully capture the audience as a whole is the solution. "Female representation is the best strategy for achieving female representation" (Murphy 2015).

Combining traditional and modern images of women does not necessarily alter stereotypes, but rather develops new ones within the patriarchal system (Giswandhani 2022). The depictions of women perpetuate their subordination by increasing men's scorn for them, creating distrust among women and strengthening pressures that push them to the margins of society.

2.5 Women Representation In Indian Films

Film is a powerful medium. It's an art form, it may pass the two hours while amusing oneself and it can be an escape from reality, but like any other media, it has a passive effect on its viewer over time (Butalia 1984). In India, films have developed into effective mediums for propagandizing, culture, education and recreation. The progressive viewpoint, the highest literacy rate, the only state with a positive female-to-male sex ratio and other factors all worked against the industry's tendency towards male-centricity and chauvinism (Johnson and Barclay 2019). Films are works of cultural art produced by certain societies. In the Indian setting, where women are perceived as fulfilling roles that are inferior to those of men, the film industry is crucial in forming ideas about gender roles and gender identities (Junaid 2021).

When one examines the origins of Indian film history, it becomes clear that the country's first feature film was produced between 1912 and 1913. The man known as the founder of Indian film is Dadasaheb Phalke. *Raja Harischandra*, a historical drama, was his 1913 release. Back then, ladies shied away from appearing in motion pictures. Thus, male artists were also required to portray feminine roles. Then, in 1930, something shifted when wealthy women entered the film industry, giving it a new look.

In the film industry, the concept of stardom originated in Hollywood theatres and then moved to Bollywood and then regional theatres. A movie's star worth draws in financial support. Generally speaking, male stars were associated with the concept of stardom. The idea of stardom is very different when it comes to female celebrities. The objective of granting female stars in the industry was to imbue the audience with a human perception of beauty and seductiveness (Seena and Nivedhitha 2016).

Indian cinema is familiar with to use of language that objectifies women, depicting them as weak, timid and in need of protection. One such portrayal is examined by Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory, which draws on Sigmund Freud's scopophilic analysis to argue that the male gaze is primarily employed for men's voyeuristic pleasure. Any patriarchal society views this kind of lust-filled stare as normal because it feeds the belief that women are objects to be used for sexual purposes. Women who are frequently subjected to male gaze begin to view other women from a male viewpoint. The term "feminine gaze" can also refer to the gaze of a film's director or producer (Tamilselvi 2018). The way women are portrayed in these films promotes societal change in the very patriarchal and male- dominated Indian society by portraying women as emotionally and financially self- sufficient. Thus, by disclosing the open-secrets such as domestic abuse, aggression, etc (Sarkar 2012).

In most films, males were viewed as the breadwinners and women's roles were limited to those of a decent housewife and mother. This is relevant to Indian women in an incredibly patriarchal society (Parmar 2020). Since women make up a significant portion of the population, how they are portrayed on film has a significant impact on preconceptions that already exist in society. Indian women of various hues in a patriarchal society have been

well-portrayed in mainstream Hindi cinema (Tere 2012). Also, many directors have been compelled by the rising popularity of item songs (glamorous songs) in their stories even though it has little bearing on the primary narrative. The women performing in glamorous songs are typically shown as sultry and sensual. Their body parts are depicted in a style that is evocative of soft erotic actresses in films (Ghosh 2021).

Discrimination and inequity are some of the apparent issues people in the media industry face daily (Rashad 2019). Indian cinema portrays women in stereotypical ways (Gangwar and Mishra 2023). The gender power structure, in which men are portrayed as the stronger sex, is evident in the majority of the films. Women are portrayed as being subservient in several situations. This reinforces the gender stereotype that demands women be obedient to males and subservient to them. It's noteworthy to observe that when it comes to gender representation in films, there is less gender equality. There are many topics in films, but one of the best and most well-liked genres is gender, which should be treated carefully (Alzahrani 2016). At times the religious stereotype is also predominantly visible as minority Christian women shown as the main heroines in Hindi cinema. These women are portrayed as immoral, seductive and unchaste women who threaten the purity of Hindu dharma by being associated with the Hindu hero (Mathew 2021). This stereotypical project made audience perceptions of gender issues are also influenced by gender depiction in the films because some gender roles reinforce and elevate men's responsibilities (Gupta and Prakash 2021).

Since the negative portrayal and objectification of women are more prevalent in Indian Cinema, it is incorrect to assume that women on Indian silver screens have always been portrayed the same way (Sibal 2018). The way Indian cinema has been made in recent decades has seen a dramatic change in the way women in films are portrayed (Agarwal 2014). India's film has evolved, with each era bringing unique characteristics. Modern movies show women as more self-reliant, self-assured and focused on their careers (Sharma and Narban 2016). There are numerous talented female filmmakers in Indian cinema, despite the industry's male-dominated nature. Many Indian female filmmakers have created impactful films that tackle diverse subjects. Today's Indian film features excellent female directors. Their films not only focus on college movies and action but also

address important social themes. Their films address important subjects and are well-received both in India and outside (Bajwa and Pruthi 2014).

There has been a notable change in how their identities are portrayed in Indian cinema, particularly in the case of the "New Woman". The Indian media landscape quickly changed in terms of how it communicated with its viewers. The Hindi cinema business was also affected by the waves of change that swept over the Indian media landscape. Cinema embraced socio-cultural views and portrayed female protagonists who had recently gained independence. The analysis of evolving representations of women in Hindi cinema raises social concerns and reflects societal norms and realities (Zafar and Batta 2017).

The female-focused films are well-received by critics and have a strong box office performance. The study's conclusions shed new light on the attitudes of female college students, including how they are portrayed as fighters, cops, gangsters, detectives, athletes and other roles that were previously exclusively filled by men rather than as individuals standing up for their rights. It demonstrates how equal men and women are and how they can now accomplish anything that men can (Kausar and Singh 2015).

Bollywood has played a significant role in Indian culture over the past century. It influenced how people interpret Indian culture and reflects on its events, traditions, beliefs and customs (Chawla 2024). In Bollywood films, women have been portrayed as nothing more than wallpaper and to some extent still are. Gender related issues, such as gender based violence, femininity, women's rights and sexuality, are frequently disregarded and most of the time, distorted (Ramkissoon 2009). Now, Bollywood has moved away from its previous portrayals of women as objects of sex, victims of male aggression, dependant, submissive and peripheral (Dhanjani 2024). This is largely because Indian society is influenced by global and transnational cultural and economic movements. What must be determined is how Concerns about patriarchy persist in contemporary Bollywood films, where women otherwise seem to adopt a forceful on-screen persona and take on leading roles (Jha 2021). Bollywood appropriates liberal ideas; as a result, the stories are firmly grounded in current social conversation. The movies provide helpful templates for contrasting different manifestations of femininity (Ahad and Akgul 2020).

The vast majority of Malayalam films depict males working in a range of jobs and hobbies, while women are primarily limited to being responsible and frugal homemakers, mothers who value tradition and of course, the fashionable, Gorgeous stupid belles with glossy hair and perfect skin provide limitless opportunities for fetishism condition (Seena and Nivedhitha 2016; Padmanabhan and Chinju 2018). The scenario there has also changed now. Amaljith (2021) studied and found that in Malayalam movies until ten years ago, women who have experienced sexual abuse in movies were typically portrayed as deadly, mentally sick and helpless, leading them to believe they are vulnerable and ultimately take their own lives. However, there has been a noticeable shift in recent years that deviates greatly from the traditional form (Vijayan 2018).

2.6 Women Representation In Tamil Films

The Tamil film industry, popularly known as Kollywood, is India's second-largest film producer, behind Bollywood, with an audience of more than 70 million. The significance of Tamil films must be emphasized in terms of their role in societal advancement. After India's independence, Tamil cinema has become the community's most significant artistic medium. Tamil cinema was extensively utilized by Dravidian political groups. The movies then served as excellent campaign material for the Dravidian parties. The film raises questions about people's habits, environments and beliefs. The people were introduced to new customs and cultures. Scriptwriters and actors who held powerful positions in the state used the movie industry as a propaganda tool to win elections. This demonstrates the significance of Tamil cinema and can be seen in its effect on the Tamil community.

Understanding the framework of gender inequalities in films is crucial. Even in the entertainment media, such as the film industry, the dominance of men over women is represented and cemented in Indian society, which is still patriarchal. Tamil commercial movies have always thrived on men's bravery. Even if Tamil women have truly torn down boundaries, the issue is so pervasive that they are objectified and treated like mere sex objects in the film business. Tamil films, even if they have a huge viewership, are sometimes notorious for being too dramatic, commercial films, idol worship, objectification of women, etc. Tamil films, which also have a male-dominated cast,

frequently feature female characters only for laughs and with little to do with the storyline (Sundaram and Radha 2019).

The movie industry has a significant influence on how the general population perceives and feels. Tamil cinema is viewed by Tamils worldwide as a cultural link to their homeland and as being essential to the formation of individual identities. Strong patriarchal ideals and beliefs are still propagated by this media, which is dominated by men. The prevalence of gender stereotypes in popular culture has hampered Tamil Nadu women, who have overcome numerous obstacles. Additionally, there is a rise in the inaccurate portrayal of women who are members of religious minorities. This stereotyping of women as members of minorities in the age of hate speech and disinformation can result in discrimination and social marginalization (Rekha and Sunitha 2019).

Women's roles have largely been reduced to that of glamorous songs, love interests or sentimental figures like mothers or sisters (Shah 2020). Although this is not the best course of action, there is also the view that a modern feminist woman projected in Tamil films who is someone rejects conventional wisdom and outdated notions that have been beneficial to society and does not conform to patriarchal conventions. The ingrained mentality that prioritizes commercial interests over rationality and social justice is the cause of this (Subhiksha 2020).

Gowrisankar, Ajit and Govindarajan (2019) said that women have consistently been portrayed as the protagonist's sex objects, obedient and willing accomplices, accepting patriarchy in its most rudimentary form while being patient. A small number of films have aimed to show that women are on par with males, even though the majority of films promote women as just objects.

The current period of modernization and globalization has made women even more open to criticism. The true definition of women's empowerment is frequently misinterpreted and it is mistakenly believed that women's empowerment consists of demeaning males or copying their behaviors and gestures. Films, as a vehicle of mass communication, must attempt to teach society that real women's empowerment is so much more than these

things. Instead of constantly portraying women as alluring, seductive tools, filmmakers ought to take greater responsibility in highlighting the positive aspects of women. (Tamilselvi 2018).

Subhiksha and Saravanakumar (2021) found that the female characters in Mani Ratnam's films are intelligent and well-balanced; they have managed to maintain their femininity while still contributing to the storyline. He has succeeded in redefining the storytelling technique in Tamil cinema and is renowned for his representation of strong female characters.

Also, when more directors with screenplays including women such as Karthick Subburaj, Ram, GopiNayinar and Brama entered the scene, the significance of female protagonist characters increased (Renit 2019). In recent years, the Hindi cinema industry has produced several films featuring strong female leads, including *Queen* and *Pink*. These films were similarly well-received by critics and audiences (Banerjee, Hameed and Sukumar 2021). Actors assuming socially conscious parts and staging them have an impact on Tamil cinema. The actors who play characters in their films from MGR to Kamal Hassan and more recently, Vijay to Vijay Sethupathi and how they present characters as "men" in those roles speak much about societal gender identities (Kasperov 2019).

2.7 Women Representation In Balu Mahendra Films

Balu Mahendra, a well-known filmmaker, is noted for his detailed character and plot development. His films frequently dive deeply into the human mind, addressing difficult emotions and societal issues with rare empathy. The portrayal of women is a common issue in Mahendra's films and it has received both critical and scholarly attention. Balu Mahendra's filmography spans several decades and features a wide spectrum of films that demonstrate his mastery of narrative technique and visual aesthetics. Strong female leads in his films are also noted for consistently challenging biases and gender norms. Mahendra's nuanced approach to character development and storytelling distinguishes him as a director capable of portraying women with subtlety and tenderness (Subhiksha and Saravanakumar 2024).

Balu Mahendra, an accomplished Tamil director, has made important contributions to how women are portrayed in his films. Mahendra's rich and multidimensional female characters transcend established gender stereotypes, portraying women as strong beings with agency, goals and aspirations. His representation of women is distinguished by rich characterization, societal commentary and emotional depth. Mahendra's films show women defying stereotypes and forging their paths, inspiring viewers to question and challenge current conventions. His female characters often show fortitude, resilience and the capacity to assert themselves in the face of challenges. They are not passive objects, but active agents who shape their futures (Rufina and Angel 2023).

Balu Mahendra's style is so personal and making those pictures is extremely tough because his technique is solely focused on the grammar of the film. Balu Mahendra has a good foundation in film, having studied at the Pune Film Institute, which is reflected in his films' superior mastery of film grammar. To make a decent picture, a director must be well-versed in basic film grammar. Some directors did not adequately learn film grammar, which caused problems with the movie's output. However, in 1978, Balu Mahendra produced *Azhiyatha Kolangal*, in which every film grammar is observed. Directors cannot succeed in their careers unless they use proper film grammar in their films. To make proper films like Balu Mahendra, one needs to learn proper film grammar and how to apply it by seeing his films, which will provide us with the basic notion (Rijitha 2021).

2.8 Implications of the Literature Review

The literature review on women and media highlights the significant role media plays in shaping societal perceptions of gender, particularly through cinema. It underscores how media often perpetuates gender stereotypes, shaping the roles and identities of women in both traditional and modern contexts. While there has been some progress in portraying women as more self-sufficient and empowered, the media still tends to reinforce patriarchal norms, limiting women's representation to passive, stereotypical roles. This review implies that while media has the potential to promote gender equality and challenge traditional gender roles, the current portrayal of women, especially in cinema, continues to reflect and perpetuate societal inequalities.

The literature review also highlights a significant shift in the portrayal of women in Indian and Tamil cinema, indicating a gradual departure from traditional stereotypes towards more complex and empowering representations. While early Indian films, including Tamil cinema, often reinforced patriarchal values by depicting women as submissive, passive or mere objects of desire, modern films increasingly showcase women as strong, independent and multi-dimensional characters. This transformation can be attributed to the rise of female filmmakers, changing societal attitudes and global influences, which have brought more nuanced portrayals of women to the forefront. Notably, directors like Balu Mahendra have played a crucial role in challenging gender norms, presenting women as active agents capable of shaping their destinies. The growing emphasis on strong female leads in both mainstream and regional films reflects a broader cultural shift towards gender equality, although challenges remain in fully overcoming deep-rooted stereotypes in the industry.

It is also learned through literature that the portrayal of women in Indian and Tamil cinema still operates within a patriarchal framework that limits the scope for true empowerment. Despite more films focusing on women's autonomy, they are often filtered through male-driven narratives or commercial interests, which sometimes dilute the authenticity of these portrayals. The challenge lies in moving beyond tokenistic representations to ensure that women in films are presented with the same depth, complexity and agency as their male counterparts, paving the way for a more inclusive and representative cinematic landscape.

CHAPTER - 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

This chapter presents information about the research design, research methods, variables and parameters used to investigate the research problem. The chapter also contains a detailed description of the theories used in this research. This information will provide an idea of how the research work is carried out for a better understanding and provide an avenue for the researchers to ensure the reliability and validity of this research.

3.2 Research Design

Research design is a systematic framework that helps the researcher provide guidelines for collecting, analyzing and interpreting the data. It presents the structure of the study and ensures that all the research objectives are met logically (Creswell and Creswell 2018). The research design is based on the approach of the study such as qualitative, quantitative or mixed-method (Babbie 2020).

This research has adopted an exploratory research design to study the research problem. Exploratory research design helps to understand the trends, audience perceptions and social and cultural representations (Stebbins 2001).

In film research, exploratory research design helps to analyze the cinematic elements such as storytelling techniques and genres present in the films. Adopting exploratory research design in films will also help to understand the film aesthetics, narrative structures, cultural and social representation and impact analysis (Hooks 1996; Lobato 2019).

This research has explored the representation of women in Balu Mahendra Films for physical attributes, character representation, narrative structures, moral & cultural values and social reflection of women characters. Hence this research design would be suitable to address the research problem.

3.3 Research Methods

Selecting Research Methods is the next important phase in any research in which the suitable methods will be identified as relevant to the research design which aids in collecting, analyzing and interpreting the data. There are two broader categories of research methods such as (i) Quantitative and (ii) Qualitative (Creswell and Creswell 2018). Quantitative research methods deal with numerical data, statistical analysis and measurement of variables. A survey is the most commonly used quantitative research method. Qualitative research methods are used to explore the social phenomena, behaviors, meanings and representation of data in a non-numerical format. It helps to gain deeper insights, contexts, meanings, interpretations and perspectives rather than numerical output (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). The common research methods used in qualitative approaches are content analysis, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, ethnography, case studies and grounded theory.

Research in general requires a thorough study design that addresses the study aim, objectives and research methods (Knafl and Howard 1984). The main purpose of this study is to explore the representation of women in Balu Mahendra's Tamil films. The study requires a deeper understanding of women's representation in Balu Mahendra Tamil Films rather than numerical inferences. The representation of women characters in the film stories concerning social and cultural aspects also needs to be explored. Hence this research has adopted the qualitative research approach to study the research problem. The qualitative data were collected using two research methods Content Analysis and In-Depth Interview.

3.4 Content Analysis

Content Analysis is a research method that is used to analyze textual, visual and audio data systematically. It helps researchers to examine the patterns, themes and meanings in the

given context. This method is mainly in qualitative research and quantitative as well (Krippendorff 2018). Qualitative content analysis mainly focuses on examining the themes, patterns and categories that interpret the meaning whereas; quantitative content analysis focuses on counting the specific words and themes. Beyond word counts or textual content quantification, qualitative content analysis explores specific meanings, themes or patterns to give the researcher a subjective yet scientific understanding of social reality (Zhang and Barbara 2005).

In film research content analysis is one of the primarily used methods. According to Gilman (1985) and Foucault (1973), movies can be considered and viewed as texts to study the representation of stereotypes. Film depictions have also frequently been dissected to examine racial and gender stereotypes of various groups (Bogle 1989). To determine the significance of the representation of women in Balu Mahendra films, a Qualitative Content Analysis was conducted. Using a qualitative content analysis method, the latent meaning of stereotypes about women in the form of verbal and nonverbal representations was examined.

There are different forms of qualitative content analysis. A few of the important forms are thematic analysis, discourse analysis, narrative analysis and ethnographic content analysis. This research adopted Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) to study the representation of women in Balu Mahendra Films.

3.4.1 Ethnographic Content Analysis

Content Analysis is used for thorough methodical examination of the contents to find themes and patterns (Leedy and Ormrod 2001). Ethnography describes and interprets a cultural or social group or system by describing people and their culture to get insights into that culture (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) is a technique that combines traditional content analysis techniques with an ethnographic approach. The method is reflexive and interactive allowing research to use coding categories based on the new emerging patterns. ECA emphasizes on content and meaning of the context and includes inductive and deductive approaches. It is mainly used in media studies, cultural studies and health communication (Altheide 1987).

Ethnographic Content Analysis or ECA, is defined by Altheide (1987) as a reflexive flow between concept creation, sampling, data gathering, data coding, data analysis and interpretation. Nonetheless, ECA was used to confirm theoretical linkages and to record and comprehend the conveyance of meaning.

The goal of this study was to investigate the visual and thematic trends, biases or representations of women in Balu Mahendramovies. Hence the study employed the ECA technique to produce insights regarding the representation of women in Tamil films directed by Balu Mahendra.

3.4.2 Sample Frame

Sample Frame is a list, database or a set of criteria that defines the population of the study. The samples will be drawn from the sample frame (Groves et al. 2009). Sample Frame will help identify the target population to ensure that the samples are representative and appropriate to achieve the research objectives.

Sampling Frame in film studies refers to the selection of films, filmmakers, audiences or any other sources that we analyze in the study (Neuendorf 2011). There are different types of sampling frames in film research. They are film-based sampling frame, audience-based sampling frame and media & textual-based sampling frame. In this research film film-based sampling frame is adopted. This technique enables the researcher to choose the samples based on genres, time, director-centric, award-winning and box office performance. Since this particular study examines the representation of women in Balu Mahendra as a Director, a director-centric sampling frame would be suitable.

3.4.3 Sampling Technique & Sample Size

Sampling Technique refers to the selection of the subset of individuals or cases from the population. The main purpose of the sampling technique is to ensure the sample is representative, reducing bias and increasing the reliability of the findings (Creswell and Creswell 2018). In film, a sampling technique is used to select films, filmmakers or any content in the movie for analysis (Bordwell, Thompson and Smith 2019). In this research, a purposive sampling technique was adopted to study the women's representation. This

method ensures that films are intentionally chosen based on relevance to the research topic. In this research, the films directed by Balu Mahendra in Tamil language are chosen to understand the representation of women in his films. So, the purposive sampling method adopted for the study would be suitable. Balu Mahendra has directed a total of 16 films in Tamil language. This research has taken all 16 films as a sample and studied the representation of women.

3.4.4 Coding Procedure

This research has used the following coding procedure to explore the representation of women in Balu Mahendra Films. The procedure has followed seven steps. They are defining the research focus, initial familiarization with film content, developing a flexible coding framework, data collection and categorization, theoretical engagement, analysis and reporting findings (Altheide 1987; Mulvey 1975; Hall 1997; Neuendorf 2011).

The primary focus of this research is studying the representation of women in Balu Mahendra Films as an auteur. The film which is directed by Balu Mahendra in Tamil language is chosen. To get familiarization with the content the researcher watched all 16 films and identified the key themes. This is used to categorize the elements present in the film. Based on this categorization and the theoretical framework, the codes were created and it is represented as variables in the study. Then again the researcher has watched all 16 films and collected the data (i.e. representation of women) based on the coding variables. The researcher has used binary codes such as 0s and 1s to represent the existence or non-existence of certain codes in the films. Then the codes were connected with the Auteur and Representation theory which is dealt with in the study. Following that the analysis was done across films to understand the trends. Finally, the findings were reported qualitatively and quantitatively using visual graphs and thematic narratives.

3.4.5 Variables of Ethnographic Content Analysis

Variables are the measurable elements in the films that influence or describe the aspects of film production, content and audience reception. In research, variables guide the study by defining the elements under investigation for the proper analysis. In this research, the

following variables are defined based on the theoretical approach of the study. The variables studied in the ethnographic content analysis are,

- Story of the films
- Representation of Women Protagonist
- Name of the Women Artist and Frequency of Use
- Name of the Women Protagonist
- Category of the Women Protagonist
- Age of the Women Protagonist
- Occupation of the Women Protagonist
- Religion of the Women Protagonist
- Marital Status of the Women Protagonist
- Language & Slang of the Women Protagonists
- Physical Appearance of the Women Protagonists
- Complexion/ Skin Tone of the Women Protagonists
- Height of the Women Protagonists
- Weight of the Women Protagonists
- Outfit of the Women Protagonists
- Hair Style of the Women Protagonists
- Make-Up of the Women Protagonists
- Ornaments of the Women Protagonists
- Representation of Women Protagonists in Scenes
- Setting of the movie/scenes
- Naturalistic Approach in film making
- No. of scenes lead protagonist appeared in a film
- No. of Minutes Protagonist appeared in a film
- Character Development of Women Protagonist
- Attitude of the character
- Character Arc
- Character Trait
- Character Diamond
- Representation of other women characters in the film

- Moral Values
- Cultural Values
- Role and Reflection of society in films

3.4.6 Analytical Procedure of Ethnographic Content Analysis Data

The data collected through ethnographic content analysis was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. All the variables were consolidated and presented in the form of tables and graphs. Then a detailed interpretation was made. Characteristics of protagonists, representation of other women characters, moral values, cultural values, roles and reflection of society in films were discussed qualitatively.

3.5 In-Depth Interview

An in-depth interview is a qualitative research method that is used to interview a limited number of respondents in-depth about a concept or subject to get information that is both true and meaningful (Kvale 1996). When used in conjunction with other techniques, in-depth interviews provide more information. In-depth interviews were conducted one-on-one to collect deeper insights regarding any concepts, ideas and so on. There are three basic categories of in-depth interviews such as semi-structured, unstructured and structured. For this study, structured interviews are used.

3.5.1 Sampling Procedure

The In-Depth Interview method has used convenience sampling techniques to collect information from the samples. The samples for the in-depth interview method are the artists performed in Tamil films directed by Balu Mahendra. Actresses and film directors who have appeared in Balu Mahendra's Tamil films were interviewed. The details of all the artists who acted in Balu Mahendra films were collected by the researcher and contacted for interview. Finally, five artists including actresses and Film directors have consented to speak. So the sample size of the in-depth interview method is five. The details of the artist are,

1. Ms. Archana, Actress
2. Ms. Vinodini, Actress
3. Mr. Ramesh Aravind, Actor & Film Director

4. Mr. Vignesh, Actor
5. Mr. Pandiarajan, Actor & Film Director

Ms. Archana is a renowned actress in the Tamil film Industry and has acted in four Balu Mahendra movies such as Neengal Kettavai (1984), Rettai Vaal Kuruvi (1987), Veedu (1988) and Sandhya Raagam (1989). She is the only actress who acted in Balu Mahendra's direction multiple times.

Ms. Vinodini is an actress who acted in the 'Vanna Vanna Pookal' film directed by Balu Mahendra in the year 1992. She has acted as one of the lead women protagonists along with actress Mounika.

Mr. Ramesh Aravind is an Actor & Film Director who acted in Balu Mahendra's 'Sathi Leelavathi' movie in the year 1995. He acted along with the women protagonists Kalpana, Heera and Kovai Sarala.

Mr. Vignesh is an actor in the Tamil industry who acted in the 'Raman Abdullah' movie directed by Balu Mahendra in the year 1997. He was earlier selected to play in Vanna Vanna Pookal movie but dropped due to some reasons.

Mr. Pandiarajan is an Indian Actor & Film Director who acted in 'En Iniya Pon Nilave' movie in the year 2001. He starred along with the women protagonist Mounika.

To maximize the possibility of honesty and help the interviewers comprehend the goal of the study, the researcher scheduled an appointment and sent the interview questions through email to all the artists one week prior. After checking with their convenience and availability, the interviews were scheduled between March 2024 and October 2024. The interview was conducted in person using a conversational style.

3.5.2 Variables of In-Depth Interview Method

The most important variables used in the in-depth interview method to understand the significance of the representation of women in Balu Mahendra films are,

- Favorite Director
- Favorite Characters in Tamil Films
- Favorite Characters in Balu Mahendra Films
- Balu Mahendra as an Auteur
- Importance given to the roles in Balu Mahendra Films
- Experience in acting in the Balu Mahendra and other director films
- Significance of Women Characters in Balu Mahendra Films
- Reflection of social reality in Balu Mahendra Films
- Appreciation & Criticism for acting in Balu Mahendra's Tamil films
- Acting or performance inputs from Balu Mahendra
- Gender balance by Balu Mahendra
- Suggestions for present artists in the Tamil Film Industry

3.5.3 Tools used for In-Depth Interview Data Collection

The researcher prepared several essential questions that aid in defining the ideas to be examined. These questions were prepared based on a thorough examination of the findings from the Ethnographic Content Analysis. Ethnographic Content Analysis has provided the details regarding the representation of women in Balu Mahendra Films. To further understand the representation of women in Balu Mahendra's films, the questions for in- depth interviews were created to understand Balu Mahendra as an auteur. The researcher used open-ended inquiries for most of the questions because they are neutral, reciprocal and intelligible (Britten 1999). The researcher recorded the interview completely and also took field notes. Then it is transcribed for permanent record and to guard against prejudice.

3.5.4 Analytical Procedure of In-Depth Interview Data

The information collected through the in-depth interview method was summarized based on the artists. The questions asked to all the five artists were consolidated and the findings were presented based on the five artists under their name. This will help the researcher to understand how the artists worked in Balu Mahendra Film and see him as an auteur with supporting insights.

3.6 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework establishes interconnected concepts and theories that provide a conceptual grasp of the research problem, measurement and theoretical links of study. In this research two important theories such as the Auteur theory and Representation theory are used to understand how women characters are represented and interpreted in Tamil films directed by Balu Mahendra.

3.6.1 Auteur Theory

Auteur theory, which emerged in the 1950s through the writings of French critic François Truffaut in his seminal essay - *A Certain Tendency in French Cinema* was later popularized by American critic Andrew Sarris to a wider audience in 1962 through his "Notes on the Auteur Theory". Andrew Sarris proposed a hierarchical framework to evaluate the directors. They are personal style, technical competence and interior meaning that emerges across the work.

The Auteur theory lies in several key principles. The theory positions the 'Director' as the primary creative force behind a film. This theoretical approach treats the director as the "author" of the film, whose personal vision, style, tone and thematic preoccupations leave a distinct imprint on their work. The theory also pointed out that the director's concern or worldview is reflected in the themes, characters or narrative structures. The cinematic style that includes camera movements, editing techniques, lighting choices or *mis-en-scene* is also part of the theory. The theory also elevates the directors to the state of artists like novelists who emphasize their creative control and personal expression (Sarris 1962).

In film research, auteur theory is mainly used for comparative studies of the directors where the films of the same directors are compared to understand the recurring themes, visual styles and ideological perspectives. It is also used for genre analysis, intertextuality, feminist critiques and digital and contemporary cinema (Kuhn and Radstone 1990). In the context of studying the representation of women in Tamil films directed by Balu Mahendra, auteur theory provides a valuable framework for exploring how Balu Mahendra shapes the portrayal of women characters, reflects societal attitudes towards gender and either reinforces or challenges prevailing norms. The theory also helps to delve into the

specific choices and recurring motifs that define a director's approach to women characters. In Tamil cinema, where gender roles have been traditionally rooted in cultural and societal expectations, the individual influence of a director can significantly alter how women are portrayed on screen.

Also, a central tenet of auteur theory is the idea that a director's personal style and recurring themes can be traced across their body of work, creating a recognizable artistic signature. This signature often includes specific approaches to character development, narrative structure and visual aesthetics. When applied to the representation of women, auteur theory facilitates an exploration of how these directorial choices impact the depiction of female characters. For instance, a director known for crafting strong, independent women in lead roles may consistently challenge traditional gender norms, while another might repeatedly fall back on stereotypes, reflecting more conservative views on gender. This research also delves into understanding the director Balu Mahendra's choice of character development and visual aesthetics in terms of representing women in his films. Hence Auteur theory is suitable to be the framework of this study.

3.6.2 Representation Theory

Representation is described as the creation of any medium that depicts aspects of reality such as people, objects, events, places, identities and other abstract concepts. Representation simply refers to the meanings associated with an identity. Mary Beltran defines a representation as "a visual, written or audio depiction of something or someone". Representation theory is a framework predominantly used in media studies to analyze how different groups, ideologies or identities are portrayed in media. This theory helps to examine how media constructs reality and influences public perception. It is defined by Hall (1997), that representation is a process where the meaning is produced and exchanged through language, symbols and media. Based on semiotics and cultural studies, this theory explores the relationship between signs, symbols and the meanings associated with the social and historical contexts. Hall (1997) identifies three fundamental layers of representation: Reflective representation is an imitation of reality, intentional representation is the creator's intended meaning and constructionist representation is through media such as cinema. While these layers are useful for analyzing a specific

representation, the reality of the things in the representations is determined by their historical contexts and modes of knowing.

Representation of important markers of identity (class, age, gender and ethnicity) includes not only how identities are portrayed in the text, but also how they are produced during the production and reception processes (Chandler 2006).

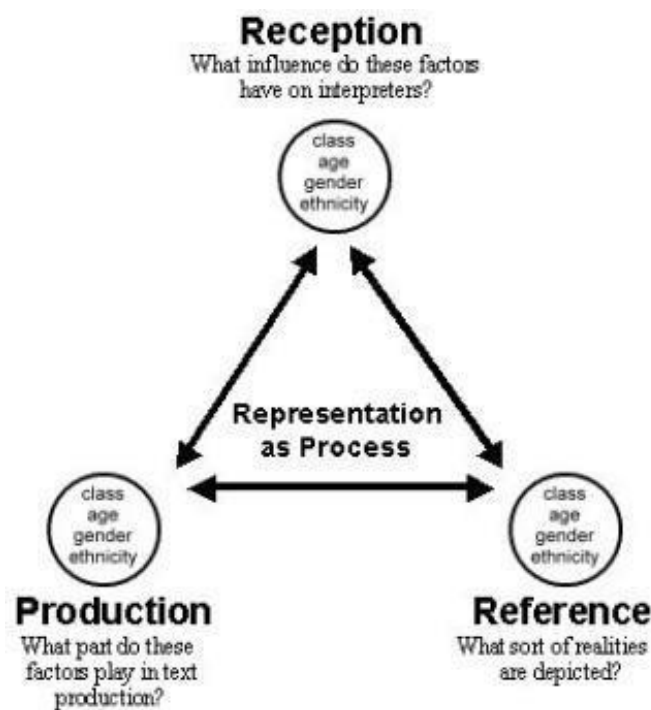


Fig. 3.1 Representation theory

Representation theory is a critical approach in cultural and media studies that examines how individuals and groups are depicted in various forms of media and how these portrayals influence societal perceptions and identities. Tamil cinema, like many other film industries, has a significant impact on public perceptions of gender roles and societal expectations. Historically, Tamil films have often portrayed women in stereotypical roles, such as the dutiful wife, self-sacrificing mother or the romantic interest of the male protagonist. These portrayals can reinforce traditional gender norms and limit the visibility of diverse female experiences. However, Tamil cinema has also produced films that challenge these stereotypes, presenting women as independent, strong and complex characters. Representation theory provides a framework to explore these contrasting

portrayals and to analyze how they reflect or resist the cultural and social norms prevalent in society. This theory is particularly relevant in exploring the representation of women in Balu Mahendra films, as it interrogates how the film shapes and reflects gender norms, stereotypes and power dynamics. In the context of Tamil films directed by Balu Mahendra, representation theory offers a valuable framework for analyzing how women are portrayed, the roles they occupy and the narratives constructed around their lives in the films.

CHAPTER - 4

ANALYSIS

4.1 Overview

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the data collected to study the representation of women in Tamil Films directed by Balu Mahendra using the ethnographic content analysis method. The various attributes such as representation of the women characters, physical appearance, women as protagonists, characteristics of women characters, moral values, cultural values and reflection of society in films portrayed by the director Balu Mahendra are discussed. The chapter also provides the result of the in-depth interview method that is taken with the artists who worked under Balu Mahendra's direction. The experiences of the artists, their opinions on the portrayal of women characters in Balu Mahendra films and the context related to Balu Mahendra as an auteur are discussed.

4.2 Story of the Films

Sixteen Tamil movies directed by Balu Mahendra are analyzed in this study. All movies were analyzed to understand the representation of women in Balu Mahendra films. Table 4.1 presents the list of Tamil Films directed by Balu Mahendra.

Table 4.1 List of Tamil Films directed by Balu Mahendra

S.No.	Film	Year
1.	Azhiyadha Kolangal	1979
2.	Moodu Pani	1980
3.	Moondram Pirai	1982
4.	Neengal Kettavai	1984
5.	Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthal	1985

6.	Rettai Vaal Kuruvi	1987
7.	Veedu	1988
8.	Sandhya Raagam	1989
9.	Vanna Vanna Pookkal	1992
10.	Marupadiyum	1993
11.	Sathi Leelavathi	1995
12.	Raman Abdullah	1997
13.	En Iniya Ponnillave	2001
14.	Julie Ganapathy	2003
15.	Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam	2005
16.	Thalaimuraigal	2013

Balu Mahendra started directing films in Tamil in the late 1970s and the first film was released in the year 1979. Totally 16 films are directed by Balu Mahendra in Tamil. Balu Mahendra is also the cinematographer for all the Tamil films directed by him. Most of his movies are directed between the 1980s and 1990s. Before presenting the result of the content analysis that examined the representation of women in his films, the story of all 16 films is summarized precisely. This will help to understand the concept and storyline dealt with in the films directed by Balu Mahendra.

4.2.1 Azhiyadha Kolangal

Azhiyadha Kolangal is a coming-of-age story about three boys named Gowri, Pattabi and Raghupathy growing up in a small village. The movie begins with Gowri, a busy businessman, receiving a letter from a childhood friend about the death of their old teacher. This brings back memories of his teenage years and the film explores the past of the boys.

In their younger days, the boys are curious to explore their hormonal changes. Gowri develops feelings for Indumathi, the new teacher in the village. The new surroundings created fear and hesitation for the teacher and the three boys started helping her out. Her kindness and gentle touch made Gowri start thinking about her more romantically. On the

other hand, Raghupathy has a crush on his cousin. When Indumathi's fiancé arrives, it leaves the boys surprised and upset. The boys also get into trouble by doing things like smoking and sneaking around. When Raghupathy's cousin leaves the village, it deeply saddens him.

A tragedy strikes when Pattabi, one of their close friends, drowns in a stream. This loss changes everything for the boys. Gowri finds comfort with Indumathi and she shares her grief with him. When she cries over Pattabi's death, Gowri hugs her, but this time the hug isn't about the feelings. Instead, it's a moment of shared sadness, showing how he's grown up after the loss of his friend.

Looking back, Gowri sees this time in his life as one of the most unforgettable moments, filled with emotions and experiences that made him who he is. The film's title, *Azhithadha Kolangal* (Unforgettable Impressions), explains these lasting memories.

4.2.2 Moodu Pani

Moodu Pani is the story of Chandru, a successful but deeply troubled businessman. His childhood was filled with pain and trauma. Chandru's father had an affair with a Sex Worker, neglecting Chandru's mother when she was seriously ill. She eventually died and this left a lasting scar on Chandru. He developed a deep hatred for Sex Workers, blaming them for his mother's death. As he grew older, this hatred turned into a violent obsession. Chandru started killing any woman whom he believed to be a Sex Worker.

Chandru knows he has problems, so he visits a psychiatrist regularly. The doctor suggests him to move on from the past by falling in love and getting married. The psychiatrist suggests that this will help Chandru to forget his painful memories and live a normal life. One day, at a donation camp, Chandru meets Rekha, a sweet and caring woman. Rekha, however, is already engaged to a police officer named Ravi. After knowing this, Chandru becomes obsessed with her. Chandru begins to watch Rekha closely and his obsession grows. One night, he wrongly suspects that Rekha's friend is a Sex Worker and ends up killing her. This murder triggers a police investigation and since Ravi is a police officer, he

gets personally involved. The police slowly start piecing together the clues, which point toward Chandru. They begin to suspect him as the killer.

Unable to control his feelings for Rekha, Chandru kidnaps her and takes her to a house in Ooty. He locks her up in a room and treats her like a prisoner. He believes that the longer she stays, the more chances of her falling in love with him. Rekha is terrified but Chandru tries to win her affection by caring for her. Meanwhile, Ravi and the police are looking for Rekha. They speak to Chandru's psychiatrist and get more information about his mental state. Slowly, the pieces of the puzzle come together and they realize that Chandru is the one who took Rekha.

While trapped in the house, Rekha tries to find a way to escape. During her attempt, she stumbles upon the skeletal remains of Chandru's mother. Chandru still believes that his mother is alive and speaks to her skeleton as if she's a living person. In the end, Ravi with his police crew tracks Chandru down. They found the house and rescued Rekha. Chandru is arrested and sent to a mental hospital, where he spent the rest of his life. The film closes with Rekha and Ravi being reunited.

4.2.3 Moondram Pirai

Moondram Pirai is the story of a young woman named Bhaaki who loses her memory after a serious accident. She ends up in a brothel without knowing how she got there. In the brothel, she meets Cheenu, a kind school teacher, who quickly realizes that Bhaaki is like a 7-year-old child and doesn't belong there.

Cheenu takes Bhaaki to his home in Ooty. He starts taking care of her like a child and calls her Viji and treats her with love. Viji considers her life there as her own and enjoys playing with her pet dog, Subramani and spending time with their neighbor old lady. Slowly, Cheenu becomes attached to Viji. Their bond grows stronger and Cheenu develops feelings for her. The school headmaster's wife Silk Smitha who was married off at a young age, starts liking Cheenu. But Cheenu only cares about taking care of Viji. One particular day, a local woodcutter tries to harass Viji. Cheenu looks for her and finally, when he can't find

her, he prays to godbreaking his belief in atheism. When he comes to know the truth, he fights with the woodcutter and swears to protect her.

On the other side, Bhaaki's father has been searching for her with the help of the police. They identified that Bhaaki is in Ooty. Neighbour old lady convinces Cheenu to take Viji to an Ayurvedic doctor to recover her from memory loss. Slowly, Viji begins to regain her lost memories. As she remembers her real life and who she was before the accident, she forgets everything about Cheenu and the time she spent with him. Later, her family comes to take her back home. Cheenu follows her to the train station, trying to remind her of the life they shared. But Viji no longer recognizes him. The movie ends with Cheenu left alone, sad and in memories of the best time he had with Viji who is completely unaware of the bond they once had.

4.2.4 Neengal Kettavai

Neengal Kettavai's story starts with the establishment of Ramu being a successful singer. The story's flashback starts in the beautiful hill station of Ooty, where Poornima, a widow, lives a peaceful life with her two young sons, Ramu and Arun. Their life is shattered when Muthulingam, a tourist, rapes Poornima, leading to her tragic death. The boys witness this horrific event, leaving a lasting scar on their hearts. After their mother's death, the brothers are separated. Ramu, the elder, is raised by his mother's brother, who is an ex-military man who trains him in martial arts to take his revenge against Muthulingam. Arun, the younger son, is adopted by a blind music teacher who teaches music and evokes his passion for music. He then becomes a renowned singer. Despite his success, the pain of their mother's loss leaves an empty gap.

Silk Smitha who is also a dancer in Arun's music band falls in love with him and emotionally supports him. On the other side, Radha who is fascinated by Ramu's talent spends time with him and they eventually fall in love. A few years later, Ramu comes to Chennai after the death of his uncle. There develops a drift between the brothers without realizing that both of them are fighting for the same cause. The brothers reunite and decide to take down Muthulingam. In the climax, the brothers confront their mother's killer and kill him for the trouble he created in their lives.

4.2.5 Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthal

Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthaal is a movie about Ravi, a dedicated police officer and Padma, his lover. The story begins with Ravi, a sincere police officer who falls in love with Padma, the sister of his best friend Babu. Babu has always been supportive of their love. Everything changes when Ravi is framed for murder by a corrupt officer called Dharmaraj. The death of Ravi's close friend, Babu was framed on Ravi. Padma becomes depressed and longs for Ravi's support. On the other hand, Ravi takes the loss of his friend personally.

As a result of the framing, Ravi is suspended from his job, ruining his reputation and finding a drift in his relationship with Padma. Ravi takes up the dangerous mission to reveal Dharmaraj's true identity and his corruption. Ravi faces numerous threats from Dharmaraj and his men, who try to stop him. Yet, Ravi stays committed to finding the truth and bringing justice. Padma supports and encourages Ravi. Ravi discovers a network of corruption that goes beyond Dharmaraj. In a fight in the climax between Ravi and Dharmaraj, Ravi becomes the true culprit. The film ends with Ravi's name cleared and receiving justice.

4.2.6 Rettai Vaal Kuruvi

Rettai Vaal Kuruvi is a story about the complicated love life of Gopi. Gopi works at a television company with his friend and colleague Margabandhu. He is married to Thulasi and together they lead a happy, peaceful life. Things change when Gopi meets Radha, a renowned singer. Gopi starts to spend more time with Radha and soon finds himself falling in love with her, despite his deep affection for his wife.

Caught in a love triangle, Gopi begins to juggle his relationships with both Thulasi and Radha, trying to keep his meeting with Radha a secret from his wife. His colleague Margabandhu tries to warn him about the dangers of having two women. Gopi feels guilty and confused, unsure of how to handle his feelings. Gopi plans to spend time with both Thulasi and Radha without either of them finding out. In an unfortunate turn of events, Thulasi and Radha end up in the same hospital for different reasons. Both of them find out that they are pregnant. Gopi's attempts to care for both women lead to a hilarious misunderstanding and confusion. Gopi's secret is finally exposed at the hospital during

their labor. Both Thulasi and Radha confront him, leading to an emotional sequence. The film concludes on a happy note, with all of them agreeing to live with each other.

4.2.7 Veedu

Veedu is a story about the challenges faced by a middle-class family in building their own house. The film travels with Sudha who takes up the responsibility of building a house for her family amidst financial struggles and social pressures.

Sudha lives with her grandfather and her younger sister in a rented house. After the struggle to find a rental house in Madras, they dream of owning their own home. They finally decide to build a house on a small piece of land they own. Sudha along with her boyfriend steps into building a house as her grandfather is old and her family is dependent on her completely. Sudha faces numerous challenges from dealing with dishonest contractors to corrupt officials who demand bribes and finds herself caught in a lot of trouble. Despite all this, Sudha remains determined to complete the house. She works tirelessly, managing the family's finances and overseeing the construction herself. The government officials, contractors and the local community's disrespectful way of communicating with her shows the harsh realities of building a home.

Suddenly, the loss of her grandfather puts her in a tough spot. The bond between Sudha and her boyfriend has been handled maturely and practically. At the end of the movie, it is shown that Sudha's house is finally completed. But the story doesn't end with a typical happy ending, but the government's negligence in approving buildings on the wrong site.

4.2.8 Sandhya Raagam

Sandhya Ragam is a movie that talks about how an old man is trying to adjust to his life in the city after the demise of his wife. Chokkalingam has a peaceful life in his village along with his wife. After the demise of his wife, he has to move on to Chennai to his nephew's house Vasu, who is a lower-middle-class man living with his wife Thulasi and daughter Valli struggling with financial problems. In the initial days, he struggled to adapt to his new life in Chennai. Valli, who isn't happy with his visit, thinks of him as a burden, despite his efforts of helping with day-to-day chores. Soon, Chookalingam understands that he is

being a burden to the family but his only ray of hope is his granddaughter Valli, with whom he spends his time. Chokkalingam tries to help them in all the small ways possible.

Things change on a specific day when Chokkalingam gets a roadside snack to Valli which makes her sick. This turns Thulasi's anger which leaves to consciously not giving him dinner. The next day, Thulasi and Vasu couldn't find Chokkalingam. They search for him everywhere. They found that Chokkalingam decided to leave Vasu's home to relieve them of the burden and joined an old age home. However, Vasu and Thulasi, realizing their mistake, beg him to stay. In the end, he decides to spend his days in the old age home and give them mental and emotional support when needed.

4.2.9 Vanna Vanna Pookkal

Manoranjitham writes a suicide note addressed to her parents and leaves home. Shenbagam is in love with her neighbor Shiva from childhood and wants to marry him. However, Shiva does not reciprocate her love. He goes to the forest to have a peaceful bath in the river. Manoranjitham, who has come to the same forest to die, notices Shiva and finds his activities interesting. Shiva meets her and stops her from committing suicide. She refuses to return to the town saying that she ran away from home as her parents were planning to get her married to someone she does not like. He stays with her that night for her safety. Soon they both fall in love and spend time together happily in the forest.

Shiva tells Azhagiri, his friend, about his love for Manoranjitham. Azhagiri noticed Shenbagam's love for Shiva and her refusal to marry anybody else other than Shiva. A rogue sees Manoranjitham bathing and tries to molest her in the forest and Shiva saves her. He makes her stay in his room and hides her from everyone but Shenbagam finds his activities suspicious.

Manoranjitham comes to know about Shiva's plan for their marriage without getting her consent. She confesses that she has a disease and will die soon. She also said that her parents were trying to get the operation done by selling the family's only house. To save her parents from the burden, she ran away from home to commit suicide and gave a different reason to Shiva during their first visit to the forest to hide this truth. The next day

morning Manoranjitham goes missing. Both Shiva and Azhagiri searched for her but couldn't find her anywhere. Finally, they saw her admitted to a hospital in a serious condition and died in Shiva's hands. Shiva returns home with sadness. Shenbagam notices and rushes to his room and gives him emotional comfort and Shiva accepts her.

4.2.10 Marupadiyum

Marupadiyum is a story that revolves around the life of Thulasi. Thulasi is an orphan who dreams of living a stable life with her loving husband. When Murali Krishna, her husband surprises her with the new house, she feels elated. Her happiness is short-lived when she discovers that Muralikrishna is cheating on her with Kavitha, a famous actress and the money to buy the house is given by Kavitha. Thulasi's life falls apart when Muralikrishna leaves her. Thulasi is drunk and begs him to come back but Muralikrishna denies it. Thulasi moves into a women's hostel. She meets Gowrishankar, a singer who helps her find a job and supports her. Slowly Gowri Shankar also became famous after his hit album.

Kavitha faces the guilt for breaking up Thulasi's marriage and she becomes increasingly unstable and obsessive over Muralikrishna. Murali agrees to file a divorce yet Kavitha becomes emotionally unstable. Thulasi's maid fights with her alcoholic husband and tries to save the future of her daughter. After the maid's husband wastes their savings, she kills him and turns herself in, leaving her daughter in Thulasi's care.

The guilt makes Kavitha leave Muralikrishna thinking that he might do the same thing he did for his wife. As Murali tries to return to Thulasi, she rejects him. Gowrishankar proposes to her, but Thulasi is uncertain about moving on and her only goal is to take care of the maid's child.

4.2.11 Sathi Leelavathi

The story revolves around Arunachalam (a) Arun, who is married to Leelavathi. Arun is unhappy with Leelavathi's looks and weight after being married to her for years and having 2 kids. He started developing an affair with Priya, the beautiful independent woman of his dreams. He meets Priya at work with whom he hides his marital status. Arun and Priya decide to go on a vacation to Bangalore, where their plans take a twist when Arun runs into

his old friend, Sakthivel, an orthopedic surgeon. Arun tries to keep his affair a secret from his friend but Arun gets caught when he injures his back and Sakthivel is called to help him. Sakthivel finds Priya in his room and he also agrees to keep the secret to help his friend.

Back in Chennai, Priya finds out that Arun is married and has children. She confronts him but Arun promises to divorce Leelavathi and they both decide to live together. Leelavathi finds out about the affair when she finds the photos taken by Sakthivel's son during the vacation. She confronts Arun and he decides to move out and live with Priya. Leelavathi, with support from Sakthivel and his wife Pazhaniammal, plots a plan to win back Arun. She sends their children to stay with Arun and Priya to create tension. Priya couldn't handle the children's torture, making her question her choices. Priya starts to regret her relationship with Arun. Her ex-lover, Raja reappears and seeks a second chance. Priya decides to leave Arun and reunite with Raja, apologizing to Leelavathi for her part in the affair. After realizing his mistake, Arun returns to Leelavathi asking for forgiveness and all three couples live happily without trouble.

4.2.12 Raman Abdullah

The story centers on two close friends, Raman and Abdullah, who share a strong bond despite their different religious backgrounds, Raman is Hindu and Abdullah is Muslim. They live in a village where their friendship often puts them in tricky situations, especially with their fathers.

Abdullah's father wants him to take a job at the local school, but Abdullah has other plans. When Raman is searching for a job, Abdullah suggests using his name to get hired at the school. The confusion arises when the strict and conservative Hajjiar finds Raman acting suspiciously. Hajjiar is a wealthy and influential man in the village who disapproves of the intercaste relationship. He is concerned about maintaining religious and social decorum.

Gowri and Ayesha have been friends for a long time. Although there is a cold war between Ayesha's father and Gowri's brother, they continue to be bestfriends despite their religious differences. The return of Abdullah makes him act under the name of Raman. Raman and

Abdullah's misadventures begin when they try to help their respective love interests, Gowri and Ayesha. Their attempts to impress and win over their love interests lead to hysterical situations. The climax of the film involves a series of misunderstandings and confrontations that eventually lead to the reveal of who is Raman and who is Abdullah. Finally, the family agrees to their marriage with their loved ones.

4.2.13 En Iniya Ponnilave

The story revolves around the life of Shiva and Rosie. The story begins with Shiva and Rosie traveling to Chennai with little money in hand. After being a victim of various fraudulent activities, they lost their car which was the source of their next meal. On finding the thief, he realizes their situation and provides them a space to live amidst the Sex Workers and fraudsters. Shiva takes up any job that comes his way to support his pregnant girlfriend. Shiva is worried about Rosie being raised in a well-off family and being moved to a very small space with no utilities yet she agrees to stay with him for the love she has.

Rosie's flashback reveals that she was sent home after her family found that she was pregnant as a teenager. The home is not a safe place for her as they plan on taking away her child after the birth. Shiva finds her and they elope in Chennai. After the birth of her child, Rosie faces a lot of issues postpartum struggles and not having Shiva to take care of the baby as he is busy with work. She wants to take up a job in modeling but struggles with harassment. Slowly, she starts adapting to the situation and gets flexible with it. She moves to a different house and new trouble arises when her neighbor starts hitting on Shiva. In the climax, when everything seems to be a bit too much, their daughter goes missing and after a big trouble, they find their child. When the parents come to visit them after knowing their whereabouts, she runs to her parents regretting her wrong decision.

4.2.14 Julie Ganapathy

Bala is a famous television serial writer. He lives a happy life with Vijaya and his daughter. After finishing the final episode of his show, he takes a break and goes to a hill station. On his way back, he meets with a car accident and is rescued by Julie Ganapathy, a kind woman who takes him to her home to recover.

However, Julie is not just a fan but she is obsessed with the serial Manga, written by Bala. When she learns that Bala killed off a beloved character in the finale, her anger turns to obsession. She forces him to rewrite the ending to her liking, revealing her dark side. Trapped in Julie's home, Bala soon realizes that she has been lying about informing his situation back home. She starts torturing him when he doesn't follow the demands of Julie, trying to desperately control the narrative of his story and his life.

The flashback reveals that Julie has been going through a hard time after her husband cheats on her. A Manga serial is her only way out. And when she gets to see the happy ending of the serial, she can keep her mind at peace. On the other hand, Vijaya looks for Bala everywhere and longs for him to come back. Bala understands that his only chance for escape is to act like going with Julie's plan. Using his creativity, he creates a plan to write the script and burn it in front of her eyes triggering her. In the end, the police rescue him but unfortunately, Bala uses his self-defense to get away from Julie, causing him to kill her in a fight. The film ends with the celebration of his new book on his survival with Julie.

4.2.15 Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam

The story follows Srinivasan, a prisoner who escapes from jail to reunite with his love, Thulasi. While riding on a truck, he shares his past with the driver, revealing what led to his life paving the way for the flashback.

In a flashback, Srinivasan comes from a wealthy family but has a troublesome relationship with his father who wants him to achieve bigger things in life. When his parents leave for a week, Srinivasan is left with their maid's daughter, during which he reconnects with Thulasi, his childhood friend. Their friendship quickly blossoms into love. Trouble arises when Srinivasan's father disapproves of their relationship due to their different social backgrounds.

Despite the fights, they continue to see each other. When Srinivasan and his friends meet in a car accident, they are kept in the police station for an inquiry. After a fight with another inmate at the police station, Srinivisan's action leads to that inmate's death and he

is convicted and sentenced to ten years in prison. When his mother hears this news, she passes away and Thulasi's family faces financial difficulties as they are not working in Srin's house anymore, forcing them to return to their village in Ooty. Srinivasan escapes from prison, determined to find Thulasi. In the climax, he tries to escape from the police, but the police leave him to rejoin Thulasi, understanding his situation and the sacrifices and pain he endured in this relationship.

4.2.16 Thalaimuraigal

The story follows Subbu, an elderly man who is separated from his son, Sivaraman in the village, because of Sivaraman's marriage to a woman from another religion. Subbu was born and brought up in a conservative background and he cannot change his mind on interreligious marriage. Subbu's traditional and conservative beliefs have created a drift in the family.

Sivaraman's son Aditya, comes to stay with Subbu in the village. The entry of Sivaraman leads to a change in Subbu's perspective. Aditya, raised in the city, struggles to adapt to rural life and his grandfather's strict rules. Stella's arrival in the village initially disturbs Subbu. But her interest in making the village a better place by agreeing to Sivaraman's interest in working there as a doctor shows her character as a loving and supportive wife. The way she lets her son and Subbu reconnect changes the opinion in Subbu's mind. Subbu and Aditya start to spend more time together and become closer. Subbu teaches Aditya about their culture, traditions and the Tamil language. Through their interactions, Subbu's views begin to change as he appreciates Aditya's innocence and curiosity.

The film depicts Subbu's transformation as he learns to accept the change and his family. Their relationship becomes a bridge that reconnects the family. The climax is emotional and uplifting, as Subbu realizes the importance of family and the need to let go of his prejudices. The film concludes on a hopeful note, with the family coming together and Subbu finding peace and happiness through his grandson's love.

4.3 Results of Ethnographic Content Analysis

The ethnographic content analysis was carried out to find and describe the representation of women in Tamil films directed by Balu Mahendra. The results are presented based on variables such as representation of women as protagonists, physical appearance, representation of women in scenes, characteristics of women protagonists, representation of other women characters in films, moral and cultural values exhibited and role & reflection of society in films.

4.3.1 Back Story of Women Protagonists

The following are the back stories of the female characters mentioned in the films and it is witnessed through the conversation of the main character or the conversation of the other characters around the main character or visuals. Before analyzing the representation of women protagonists, the back story of the women protagonists portrayed in the film was carefully analyzed. This will help to understand how the women protagonists are glued within the story. The back story of 23 women protagonists in Balu Mahendra films is discussed below.

Indumathi, Azhiyadha Kolangal

A new teacher in the village, Indumathi lost her parents at a young age and navigates life alone, waiting to get married to her long-distance boyfriend.

Rekha, Moodu Pani

While her backstory isn't detailed, Rekha is depicted as a woman from Bangalore who is awaiting to reunite with her school friend.

Viji, Moondram Pirai

After losing her memory in an accident, Viji ends up in a brothel, unable to recall her name, family or background.

Radha, Neengal Kettavai

Not much is revealed about Radha's past, but she is shown as a teacher who develops feelings for Arun, whom she cooks and cares for.

Padma, Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthal

Padma lives with her brother and grandmother, awaiting her wedding to her brother's friend, Ravi.

Thulasi, Rettai Vaal Kuruvi

Not much is revealed about Thulasi's past except that she and her husband have been married for three years.

Radha, Rettai Vaal Kuruvi

Radha's mother passed away when she was young her father frequently travels, leaving her feeling lonely.

Sudha, Veedu

Orphaned young, Sudha was raised by her grandfather and feels a strong responsibility for her younger sister's future.

Thulasi, Sandhya Raagam

After overcoming numerous financial and family struggles, Thulasi marries her love, Vasu.

Shenbagam, Vanna Vanna Pookkal

Shenbagam develops a one-sided love for Siva, trying to win his love and attention for more than ten years.

Manoranjini, Vanna Vanna Pookkal

Manoranjini runs away from home to avoid an arranged marriage, later revealed to have a serious illness.

Thulasi, Marupadiyum

Thulasi is an orphan who marries Muralikrishna and is focused on building a stable home. He hates the idea of infidelity.

Kavitha, Marupadiyum

An actress who faced childhood trauma after her father left her. Kavitha becomes extremely possessive and seeks psychological help to manage her mental health issues.

Priya, Sathi Leelavathi

Growing up in an ashram as an orphan, Priya is ambitious and looking for a wealthy partner, with a desire for a secure future.

Leelavathi, Sathi Leelavathi

Leelavathi struggles with weight gain after marriage, leading to feelings of insecurity.

Pazhani, Sathi Leelavathi

Not much is revealed about Pazhani except for her love and possessive feeling for her husband, Shakthivel.

Gowri, Raman Abdullah

Not much is mentioned about Gowri's past, other than her upbringing with a brother who frequently fought against the Muslim community.

Ayesha, Raman Abdullah

Not much is mentioned about her past, other than having a religious rebel father.

Rosie, En Iniya Ponnilave

Rosie, a Christian girl from a wealthy family, becomes pregnant by her boyfriend, Shiva. Her family sends her to a hostel in Ooty to give away the child, but Rosie eventually reunites with Shiva.

Vijaya, Julie Ganapathy

Vijaya waits for her husband to return from his writing trip. When he doesn't return, her worry increases; the distance and separation make her understand her love for him.

Julie, Julie Ganapathy

After being betrayed by her husband, Julie faces trauma and she finds peace in a character called Manga from Bala's book. Toward the end. It is revealed that she killed her husband.

Thulasi, Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam

Thulasi and Sreeni were childhood friends until Thulasi relocated to her grandmother's place. Sreeni was her comfort and emotional support when her dad passed away.

Stella, Thalaimuraigal

Stella is an orphan who falls in love with Shivaram in college and marries him. Due to the difference in religion, the family doesn't support their wedding.

4.3.2 Representation of Women Protagonists

The protagonist is the main character of the story and they affect the plot and influence the story. Out of the 16 Tamil films directed by Balu Mahendra, 23 women protagonists have been shown prominently in his movies.

Also, the films directed by Balu Mahendra have shown women as the protagonist in all his films and the story revolves around them.

The representation of women protagonists concerning their names, categories, ages, occupations, religions, marital status, settings, naturalistic approach and slang were measured and presented in this section.

4.3.2.1 Name of the Women Artist and Frequency of Use

This section presents information about the women artists who acted in Balu Mahendra's direction.

The details are presented in Table 4.2. Totally 18 main women artists acted in director Balu Mahendra's films. All these 18 women are represented as the main leads in the story.

Table 4.2 List of Main Women Artists Acted in Balu Mahendra Films

S.No	Artist Name	Film Names	Frequency
1	Archana	Veedu, Sandhya Raagam, Rettai Vaal Kuruvi, Neengal Kettavai	4
2	Shobha	Azhiyatha Kolangal, Moodu Pani	2
3	Madhavi	Un Kannil Neer Vazhindhal	1
4	Sridevi	Moondram Pirai	1
5	Radhika	Rettai Vaal Kuruvi	1
6	Rohini	Marupadiyum	1
7	Revathi	Marupadiyum	1
8	Mounika	Vanna Vanna Pookkal, En Iniya Ponnilave	2
9	Vinodhini	Vanna Vanna Pookkal	1
10	Heera	Sathi Leelavathi	1
11	Kalpana	Sathi Leelavathi	1
12	Kovai Sarala	Sathi Leelavathi	1
13	Rudhra	Raman Abdullah	1
14	Easwari Rao	Raman Abdullah	1
15	Ramya Krishnan	Julie Ganapathy	1
16	Saritha	Julie Ganapathy	1
17	Priyamani	Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam	1
18	Ramya Shankar	Thalaimuraigal	1

Balu Mahendra's films are renowned for featuring a range of talented actresses who have delivered memorable performances. Among them, Archana stands out as the most frequently casted heroine, appearing in four of his films. Shobha and Mounika acted in two movies each showing recurring performances in each of their films. Artists like Sridevi, Radhika, Revathi, Ramya Krishnan, Heera and Priyamani appeared in one film but those films are significant in their careers and show a standout performance. In certain movies like Marupadiyum, Sathileelavathi, Julie Ganapathy and Raman Abdullah, more than one artist played an important role. This shows that Balu Mahendra features multiple prominent women roles in the same film.

While some actresses were repeatedly cast, certain actresses cast at one time were iconic roles. Sridevi's performance in "Moondram Pirai" (1982) had brought the National Film Award for Best Actress, highlighting her exceptional talent. Archana's performance in "Veedu" (1988) as a woman confronting challenges while building her home also received the National Film Award for Best Actress. These awards show that Balu Mahendra does not just bring out the powerful performances from the actress but also creates complex and relatable female characters.

4.3.2.2 Name of the Women Protagonist in Films

Balu Mahendra's women characters in his films have names that are short and consist of 1-2 syllables. Most of the names are represented in a single word. Table 4.3 presents the character names of the protagonists who acted in Balu Mahendra films.

Table 4.3 Character Names of the Protagonist in Balu Mahendra Films

S.No	Film	Character Name
1.	Azhiyadha Kolangal	Indumathi
2.	Moodu Pani	Rekha
3.	Moondram Pirai	Bhaaki/Viji
4.	Neengal Kettavai	Radha
5.	Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthal	Padma
6.	Rettai Vaal Kuruvi	Thulasi
7.	Rettai Vaal Kuruvi	Radha

8.	Veedu	Sudha
9.	Sandhya Raagam	Thulasi
10.	Vanna Vanna Pookkal	Shenbagam
11.	Vanna Vanna Pookkal	Manoranjini
12.	Marupadiyum	Thulasi
13.	Marupadiyum	Kavitha
14.	Sathi Leelavathi	Priya
15.	Sathi Leelavathi	Leelavathi
16.	Sathi Leelavathi	Pazhani
17.	Raman Abdullah	Ayesha
18.	Raman Abdullah	Gowri
19.	En Iniya Ponnillave	Rosie
20.	Julie Ganapathy	Vijaya
21.	Julie Ganapathy	Julie Ganapathy
22.	Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam	Thulasi
23.	Thalaimuraigal	Stella

The names given to women protagonists are linguistically easy to pronounce and reflect the common names from that era (1979 - 2013). The name Thulasi appears in 4 movies and among the 23 characters, 8 names are traced to have Tamil origin, giving a sense of common ground among the Tamil audience. Amidst the common names like Sudha and Gowri, Balu Mahendra also introduces names like Manoranjini and Shenbagam, to add distinctive flavor to the films. The movie name Sathi Leelavathi encompasses the name of the women character Leelavathi to add to the enhancement of the character. Pazhani, a well-rooted Tamil Nadu town from the south, known for the temple of the lord 'Murugar', showcases how the character's nature is related to the name by always carrying a sacred ash and vermilion mark on her forehead, establishing a name with a relatable connection to the audience who watch the character's life.

The name 'Thulasi' appeared in multiple films such as Rettai Vaal Kuruvi, Sandhya Raagam, Marupadiyum and Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam. The name Radha appears in Neengal Kettavai and Rettai Vaal Kuruvi. In Rettai Val Kuruvi, the two protagonists were given

equal importance. Sathi Leelavathi features three different characters (Priya, Leelavathi, Pazhani), suggesting a complex narrative with multiple key female roles. The only movie where the protagonists were given names in two words is Julie Ganapathy 's movie. Julie refers to the common name used in the Christian religion and Ganapathy refers to the Hindu God. The combination of both religious names has given a different approach. The variety in character names suggests a diverse range of roles played, highlighting the actress's versatility in portraying different personalities across genres.

4.3.2.3 Category of the Women Protagonist

The category of the protagonist refers to the level of experience they have before acting in Balu Mahendra Films. The women performers in Balu Mahendra's movie can be divided into the broader categories of well-established actors and debutant actors. Debutant refers to the introduction of a specific artist in Balu Mahendra Film as a protagonist. Experienced/ Well-established refers to the artist having prior acting experiences before engaging in Balu Mahendra films. The results are presented in Fig. 4.1.

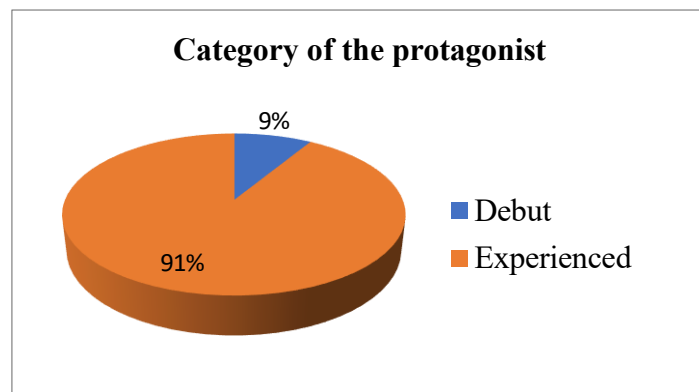


Fig. 4.1 Category of the women protagonist

The results show that in the 16 Tamil movies of Balu Mahendra, his casting choices highlight a strategic mix of well-established and debutant actors. Out of his 16 Tamil films, he prominently featured renowned actresses such as Shobha in *Sandhya Ragam*, Sridevi in *Moondram Pirai*, Revathi in *Marupadiyum* and Archana in *Veedu*, among others from Tamil cinema and beyond. He introduced two debutants namely actress Vinodhini and actress Mounika. Mounika was introduced in *Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthal* film in the year 1985 and actress Vinodhini was introduced in his film *Vanna Vanna Pookkal* in 1992.

Vinodhini, who had previously appeared as a child artist, took on her first leading role in this film. Though actress Ramya Shankar's first movie was released (Naveena Saraswathi Sabatham) before Thalaimuraigal, she got recognition through her performance in the movie Thalaimuraigal.

4.3.2.4 Age of the Women Protagonist

The representation of the protagonist concerning age is one of the important factors in Balu Mahendra films. The results of the age of the protagonist acted in Balu Mahendra films are presented in Fig. 4.2.

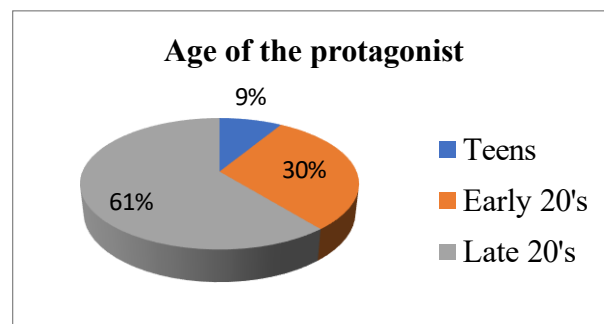


Fig. 4.2 Age of the Women Protagonist

The result found that the age of female characters is not always explicitly mentioned in Balu Mahendra Films. However, the content analysis of the films analyzed under the context of a professional setting and educational setups are used to infer the approximate age range of the protagonists. For example, characters in professional settings can be stated to be in their late twenties, reflecting a mature personality. Likewise, characters portrayed in educational or youthful contexts are generally inferred to be in their early twenties or even younger.

Among the 23 female protagonists across Balu Mahendra's films, 14 are depicted as being in their late twenties (between 26 to 29 years old), embodying maturity and growth. Six characters are shown as early teens, indicating themes related to youth. Two films feature characters under the age of 20: *Vanna Vanna Pookkal* and *En Iniya Ponnilave* present characters, focusing on the challenging subject of youthful innocence, problems and teenage pregnancy.

4.3.2.5 Occupation of the Women Protagonist

Analyzing the occupation of the women protagonist in Balu Mahendra's films helps to understand how he defines and structures the women characters in films. The results are presented in Fig. 4.3.

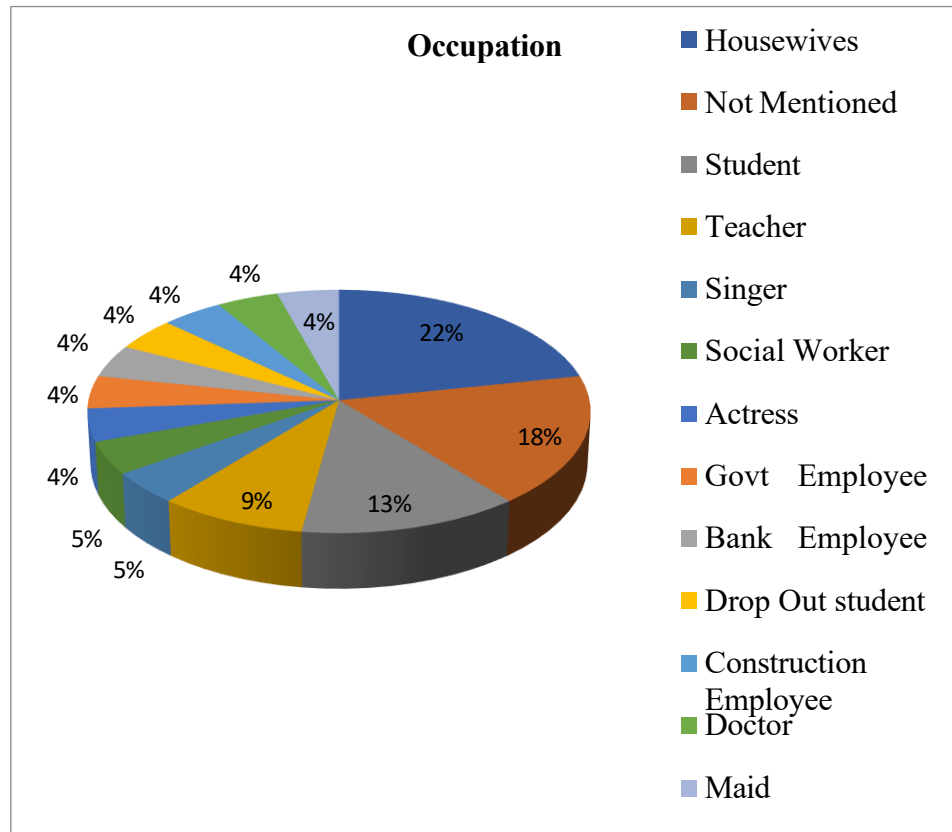


Fig. 4.3 Occupation of the Women Protagonist

Balu Mahendra's women characters are portrayed with a diverse range of occupations in his films focusing on the socio-economic conditions and varied roles of women in society. 22% of the women characters are represented as housewives whereas 18% of the women's occupations are not explicitly mentioned. 13% of the characters are represented as students.

The most portrayed working sector is the education sector, played by characters like *Indumathi* from "Azhiyadha Kolanga" and *Radha* from "Neengal Kettavai" who work as teachers constitute 9%. Their roles highlight intellectually strong and independent women with moral grounding. *Stella*, a doctor in "Thalaimuraigal" highlights the health sector as a

professional and compassionate woman. *Kavitha*, an actress in "Marupadiyum" indicates the art and media sector as a public profession. *Sudha*, a government employee in "Veedu" and *Padma* from "Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthal" who works at an old age home, represent the social service sector. Priya's role in "Sathi Leelavathi" where she works for a construction company, highlights participation in the private sector.

Balu Mahendra has given an equal share of roles to women as homemakers too, which includes the character Thulasi in all the films (Rettai Vaal Kuruvi, Sandhya Raagam and Marupadiyum) except for Adhu Oru Kanaa Kaalam. *Leelavathi* in "Sathi Leelavathi" and *Pazhani* also in "Sathi Leelavathi" reflect traditional domestic roles. Characters like *Rosie*, a student in "En Iniya Ponnillave" and *Gowri & Ayesha*, are also students in "Raman Abdullah" represent the younger generation. *Radha*, a singer in "Rettai Vaal Kuruvi", *Julie Ganapathy*, a dropout medical student in "Julie Ganapathy" and *Thulasi*, a maid in "Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam" are unique roles that add depth to the portrayal of women's varied occupation in society. This representation shows how Balu Mahendra's characters show women in different roles and life situations. They add to the film's themes, highlighting women as complex individuals dealing with a variety of challenges and experiences.

4.3.2.6 Religion of the Women Protagonist

In Balu Mahendra's films, the religion of the characters is not stated outright but can be inferred through certain things. The religion of the character can be reasoned through their involvement in religious spaces like churches, temples, etc. or by their names or traditional marks like sacred ash, bindi's and vermillion or symbolic jewelry such as mangalsutra or chains with a cross symbol. The results are presented in Fig. 4.4.

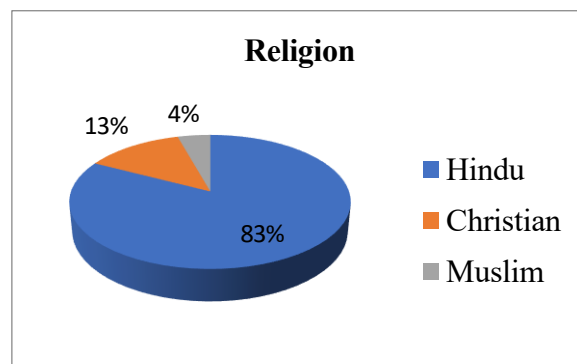


Fig. 4.4 Religion of the Women Protagonist

These results show that the women protagonists' religious identities, add depth to their cultural and personal backgrounds without explicitly stating their religious beliefs. Most of the women protagonists acted in Balu Mahendra's films are shown as Hindu. 19 out of 23 major characters are fitting in such description, whereas a few characters, like Julie, Rosie and Stella, are portrayed as Christians and the only character Ayesha is Muslim.

4.3.2.7 Marital Status of the Women Protagonist

Balu Mahendra is known for portraying real-time problems surrounding marriage, relationship stigmas, illicit affairs and other complexities in personal life. To understand this perspective in-depth, the marital status of the women protagonist is analyzed and the results are presented in Fig. 4.5.

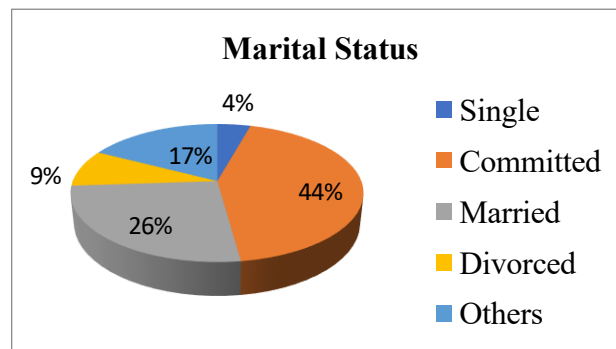


Fig. 4.5 Marital Status of the Women Protagonist

44% of the characters are shown as committed followed by 26% as married, 17% as single, 9% as divorced and 4% belongs to others category.

To explore it in detail, Bhaaki in *Moondram Pirai* is categorized as single, as her character with the mind of a 6-year-old cannot be considered to be in love with Cheenu being confused with her affection.

Ten characters are categorized in the "Committed" category, showing established romantic interests, which shows the various relationship dynamics, from the long-distance relationship of Indumathi to Rosie's teenage pregnancy in "*En Iniya Ponnillave* and others". Six characters are categorized as married, with each woman facing their struggles. Thulasi in "*Rettai Vaal Kuruvi*" and Leelavathi in "*Sathi Leelavathi*" deal with the challenges of

unloving, cheating husbands, while characters like Pazhani, Stella and Vijaya are depicted in loving, caring marriages.

Balu Mahendra also explores the journey of women after divorce, shown in characters like Thulasi in "Marupadiyum" and Julie in "Julie Ganapathy ", who are struggling to find their paths after divorce.

Balu Mahendra's portrayal of women with unconditional, obsessive love for committed or married men is shown through characters like Priya in "Sathi Leelavathi" and Kavitha in "Marupadiyum" each with their reasons. Other complex relationships include Radha in "Rettai Vaal Kuruvi" who has a child with a married man and Shenbagam, who experiences her feelings as a one-sided lover for a man interested in someone else. The portrayal of different marital statuses in Balu Mahendra films allows for enhanced, varied storytelling that shows themes of love, societal pressure and personal growth.

4.3.2.8 Language & Slang of the Women Protagonists

The women characters in Balu Mahendra's films primarily converse in Tamil and are linguistically strong. Stella in *Thalaimuraigal* initially converses in English but gradually learns Tamil. The dialogues for all the films and characters are generally in a neutral Tamil dialect and do not have any accent except for the character Pazhani in *Sathi Leelavathi*, who carries Coimbatore slang.

The Pazhani character distinguishes her speech from that of other characters. Additionally, Viji in *Moondram Pirai* carries a very child like manner of speaking, establishing her character's unique situation.

This attention to linguistic details adds authenticity and depth to the characters in his films. Other than these specific contexts, the other women characters are framed in terms of having good Tamil dialect in their slang.

4.3.3 Physical Appearance of the Women Protagonists

The physical appearance of the women in Balu Mahendra's movies is observed through various attributes such as their complexion/ skin tone, height, weight, outfit, hairstyle, makeup and ornaments. Balu Mahendra is known for his authentic and naturalistic portrayal of characters in his films. In the same way, he also takes a special compliment in representing the women characters in his directorial movies.

4.3.3.1 Complexion/ Skin Tone of the Women Protagonists

The complexion/skin tone of the women characters in Balu Mahendra films is measured to understand the importance he has given to women characters under the category of fair skin and dark tone. The result is presented in the Fig. 4.6.

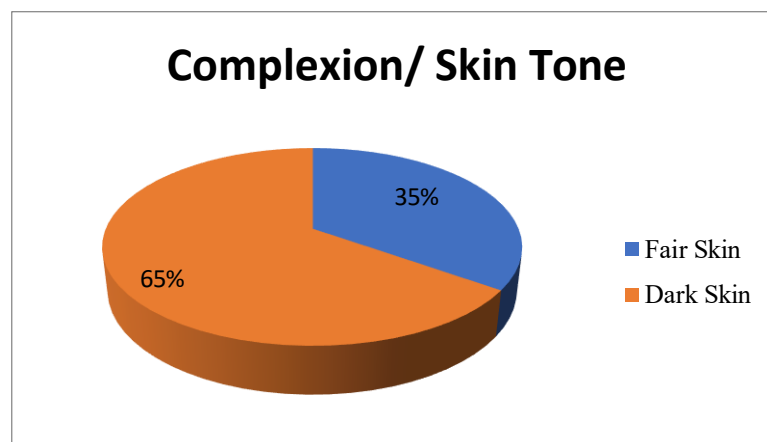


Fig. 4.6 Complexion/ Skin Tone of the women protagonists

The result shows that the women characters predominantly have darker skin tones (65%), establishing that the characters are carefully selected and stand out from the typical preference for fair skin in mainstream cinema. This casting allows the audience, who are predominantly dark in the southern part of Tamil Nadu, to view a part of themselves on the screen with the character. 35% of the women characters are represented in fair skin tone. Out of 23 characters, 15 characters are portrayed with dark skin tones and 8 characters are portrayed with a fairer skin tone.

4.3.3.2 Height of the Women Protagonists

Another major attribute when describing a person's physical attributes is their height. The height of the women characters represented in Balu Mahendra movies is analyzed and presented in Fig. 4.7.

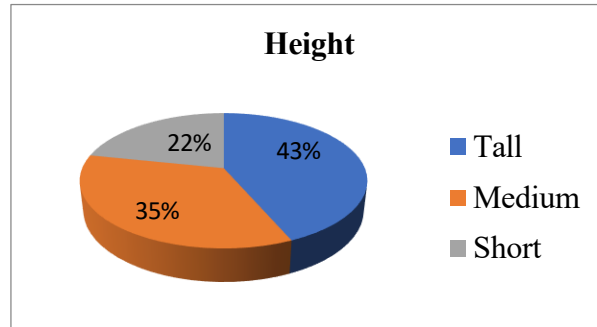


Fig. 4.7 Height of the Women Protagonists

Balu Mahendra has cast women characters with a wide range of heights, where he has consciously chosen female artists who are equal to or taller than their partners, such as Heera in *Sathi Leelavathi*, Ramya Shankar in *Thalaimuraigal* and Archana in *Veedu*.

This shows how he breaks the social norms of women being shorter than their partners. Ten (43%) out of the 23 women protagonists used in his movies are tall, eight (35%) were neither too tall nor short with medium height and five (22%) are considered to be short.

4.3.3.3 Weight of the Women Protagonists

Body weight is another important factor that is considered in understanding the physical attributes of a character. The establishment of the weight of women characters in Balu Mahendra is analyzed and presented in Fig. 4.8.

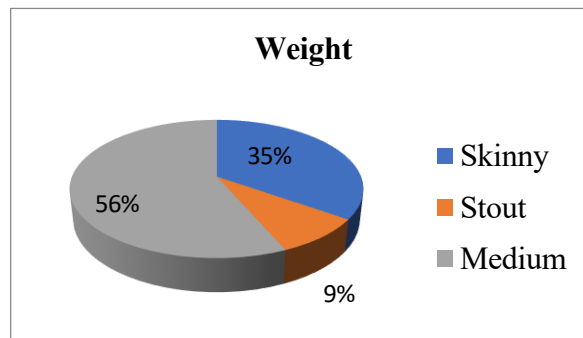


Fig. 4.8 Weight of the Women Protagonists

56% of the women protagonists shown in Balu Mahendra movies are represented with medium weight. 35% are shown as skinny and 9% have resembled weight. Balu Mahendra, in his movies, portrayed characters with certain artists who are overweight like Kalpana in Sathi Leelavathi and Saritha in Julie Ganapathy, to show the insecurities attached to the character. Five out of 23 characters are represented as skinny, such as Easwari Rao in Raman Abdullah, Priyamani in Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam and others.

4.3.3.4 Outfit of the Women Protagonists

The outfit worn by characters in Balu Mahendra's film is analyzed in each scene along with the frequency of wearing that particular outfit. The analysis portrays the variety in clothing styles, portraying both traditional and modern influences. Two categories of outfits were measured such as traditional and western. Outfits such as sarees, half sarees, chudidhars, kurtis and other culturally Indianized attire fall under the traditional category. Outfits such as Jeans & Shirts, Skirts & tops, Frocks and Nightwear/Others are listed under the Western category. The results are presented in table in Tables 4.4 and 4.5.

Table 4.4 Traditional Attire of the Women Protagonists

S.No	Film	Artist Name	Saree	Half Saree / Skirt	Kurti/ Chudidhar
1.	Azhiyadha Kolangal	Shobha	Yes	Yes	
2.	Moodu Pani	Shobha	Yes		Yes
3.	Moondram Pirai	Sridevi	Yes	Yes	
4.	NeengalKettavai	Archana	Yes	Yes	
5.	Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthal	Madhavi	Yes	Yes	Yes
6.	Rettai Vaal Kuruvi	Archana	Yes		
7.	Rettai Vaal Kuruvi	Radhika	Yes		Yes
8.	Veedu	Archana	Yes		
9.	Sandhya Raagam	Archana	Yes		
10.	Vanna Vanna Pookkal	Mounika	Yes	Yes	Yes
11.	Vanna Vanna Pookkal	Vinodhini			Yes
12.	Marupadiyum	Revathi	Yes		

13.	Marupadiyum	Rohini	Yes	Yes	Yes
14.	Sathi Leelavathi	Heera	Yes		Yes
15.	Sathi Leelavathi	Kalpana	Yes		Yes
16.	Sathi Leelavathi	Kovai Sarala	Yes		
17.	Raman Abdullah	Rudra	Yes	Yes	Yes
18.	Raman Abdullah	Easwari Rao	Yes	Yes	Yes
19.	En Iniya Ponnillave	Mounika	Yes		Yes
20.	Julie Ganapathy	Ramya Krishnan	Yes		Yes
21.	Julie Ganapathy	Saritha	Yes		Yes
22.	Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam	Priyamani		Yes	Yes
23.	Thalaimuraigal	Ramya Shankar	Yes		

Most of the women characters are shown as wearing sarees in the majority of the scenes. Revathi in Marupadiyum, Ramya Krishnan in Julie Ganapathy, Archana in Veedu and Ramya Shankar in Thalaimuraigal are seen majorly in the traditional attire. The saree is the most frequently worn attire, with nearly every actress listed having worn it in their respective films.

This suggests that the saree is a staple outfit for the women leads in Balu Mahendra Films. Some actresses wore half sarees or skirts, mostly in films that may have depicted younger or traditional characters. Examples include Shobha in "Azhiyadha Kolangal", Sridevi in "Moondram Pirai" and Rudra in "Raman Abdullah". Kurti/Chudidhar Usage appears less frequently but is still notable. Shobha in "Moodu Pani", Madhavi in "Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthal" and Heera in "Sathi Leelavathi" are some actresses who wore them, indicating a shift towards more modern or casual traditional clothing in certain films. The outfits, such as jeans, shirts, t-shirts, frocks and skirts, fall under the modern outfit with contemporary trends from that era.

Table 4.5 Western Attire of the Women Protagonists

S.No	Film	Artist Name	Jean & Shirt	Skirt & top	Frock	Nightwear/ Others
1.	Azhiyadha Kolangal	Shobha				
2.	Moodu Pani	Shobha	Yes	Yes	Yes	
3.	Moondram Pirai	Sridevi	Yes		Yes	
4.	Neengal Kettavai	Archana				
5.	Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthal	Madhavi	Yes		Yes	
6.	Rettai Vaal Kuruvi	Archana				Yes
7.	Rettai Vaal Kuruvi	Radhika	Yes		Yes	Yes
8.	Veedu	Archana				
9.	Sandhya Raagam	Archana				
10.	Vanna Vanna Pookkal	Mounika		Yes		
11.	Vanna Vanna Pookkal	Vinodhini		Yes	Yes	
12.	Marupadiyum	Revathi				
13.	Marupadiyum	Rohini	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
14.	Sathi Leelavathi	Heera	Yes			Yes
15.	Sathi Leelavathi	Kalpana				
16.	Sathi Leelavathi	Kovai Sarala				
17.	Raman Abdullah	Rudhra				
18.	Raman Abdullah	Easwari Rao	Yes	Yes	Yes	
19.	En Iniya Ponnillave	Mounika	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
20.	Julie Ganapathy	Ramya Krishnan				
21.	Julie Ganapathy	Saritha	Yes		Yes	
22.	Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam	Priyamani	Yes			
23.	Thalaimuraigal	Ramya Shankar				Yes

Jean & Shirt is worn by several actresses, suggesting a modern or casual representation of their characters. Notable characters include Shobha in "Moodu Pani", Sridevi in "Moondram Pirai" and Priyamani in "Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam". Skirt/Top is relatively less common but appears in films where characters likely have youthful or stylish roles. Mounika in "Vanna Vanna Pookkal" and Rohini in "Marupadiyum" are some examples. Frocks appear in several films, often linked to characters in their younger years or with a certain innocence. Madhavi in "Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthal", Vinodhini in "Vanna Vanna Pookkal" and Easwari Rao in "Raman Abdullah" are some actresses who wore frocks. Some actresses are noted for wearing nightwear or other unspecified outfits in certain films. Archana in "Rettai Vaal Kuruvi", Radhika in "Rettai Vaal Kuruvi" and Heera in "Sathi Leelavathi" wore nightwear, indicating scenes that required such attire. Mounika in En Iniya Ponnillave and Rohini in Marupadiyum are seen wearing a lot of nightwear. This choice of outfit is used to enhance the character and need for the scene and also to reflect the evolving culture and fashion within the films.

4.3.3.5 Hair Style of the Women Protagonists

Hairstyle makeovers are categorized into traditional and modern, reflecting Indian and Western trends from that period. Traditional hairstyles include neatly tied buns and braids with or without flowers such as jasmine or rose that fit well with Indian looks and aesthetics. Modern hairstyles include freehair, ponytails with styled cuts and short hair with other contemporary elements. The hairstyles of the women protagonists who acted in Balu Mahendra films are analyzed and the result is presented in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6 Hair Style of the Women Protagonists

S.No	Film	Artist Name	Traditional	Modern
1.	Azhiyadha Kolangal	Shobha	Yes	Yes
2.	Moodu Pani	Shobha	Yes	Yes
3.	Moondram Pirai	Sridevi	Yes	Yes
4.	Neengal Kettavai	Archana	Yes	
5.	Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthal	Madhavi	Yes	Yes
6.	Rettai Vaal Kuruvi	Archana	Yes	Yes

7.	Rettai Vaal Kuruvi	Radhika	Yes	Yes
8.	Veedu	Archana	Yes	Yes
9.	Sandhya Raagam	Archana	Yes	
10.	Vanna Vanna Pookkal	Mounika	Yes	Yes
11.	Vanna Vanna Pookkal	Vinodhini	Yes	Yes
12.	Marupadiyum	Revathi	Yes	Yes
13.	Marupadiyum	Rohini	Yes	Yes
14.	Sathi Leelavathi	Heera	Yes	Yes
15.	Sathi Leelavathi	Kalpana	Yes	Yes
16.	Sathi Leelavathi	Kovai Sarala	Yes	
17.	Raman Abdullah	Rudhra	Yes	Yes
18.	Raman Abdullah	Easwari Rao	Yes	Yes
19.	En Iniya Ponnillave	Mounika	Yes	Yes
20.	Julie Ganapathy	Ramya Krishnan	Yes	Yes
21.	Julie Ganapathy	Saritha		Yes
22.	Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam	Priyamani	Yes	Yes
23.	Thalaimuraigal	Ramya Shankar	Yes	Yes

The result found that in general, most of the characters are seen with a mix of both hair makeovers based on the scene and setting. Saritha in Julie Ganapathy is seen with only a modern hairstyle, whereas Archana in Sandhya Raagam, Neengal Kettavai and Kovai Sarala in Sathi Leelavathi are seen in traditional hairstyles.

4.3.3.6 Make -Up of the Women Protagonists

Balu Mahendra is known for his realistic portrayal of characters on screen. The naturalistic approach of characters aligns with his film scene and setting, portraying most women protagonists with minimal makeup to no makeup look. This helps to enhance the natural features of a person. The films were analyzed to understand what kind of makeup was applied to the women protagonists in his films. The detailed results are presented in Table. 4.7. Two categories of makeup were analyzed. They are minimal or subtle makeup and heavy makeup. The subtle makeup is the minimal look sometimes including eyeliner, kajal

and a light shade of lipstick with Bindi. Heavy makeup refers to the use of more cosmetic products to look dramatic or highly stylized.

Table 4.7 Make - Up of the Women Protagonists

S.No	Film	Artist Name	Minimal	Heavy
1.	Azhiyadha Kolangal	Shobha	Yes	
2.	Moodu Pani	Shobha	Yes	
3.	Moondram Pirai	Sridevi	Yes	
4.	Neengal Kettavai	Archana	Yes	
5.	Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthal	Madhavi	Yes	
6.	Rettai Vaal Kuruvi	Archana	Yes	
7.	Rettai Vaal Kuruvi	Radhika	Yes	Yes
8.	Veedu	Archana	Yes	
9.	Sandhya Raagam	Archana	Yes	
10.	Vanna Vanna Pookkal	Mounika	Yes	
11.	Vanna Vanna Pookkal	Vinodhini	Yes	
12.	Marupadiyum	Revathi	Yes	Yes
13.	Marupadiyum	Rohini	Yes	Yes
14.	Sathi Leelavathi	Heera	Yes	
15.	Sathi Leelavathi	Kalpana	Yes	
16.	Sathi Leelavathi	Kovai Sarala	Yes	
17.	Raman Abdullah	Rudhra	Yes	
18.	Raman Abdullah	Easwari Rao	Yes	
19.	En Iniya Ponnillave	Mounika	Yes	
20.	Julie Ganapathy	Ramya Krishnan	Yes	Yes
21.	Julie Ganapathy	Saritha	Yes	
22.	Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam	Priyamani	Yes	
23.	Thalaimuraigal	Ramya Shankar	Yes	

The result found that Bindi and Kajal are predominantly seen in most of the characters in the film. This maintains the realism of the characters, making them more relatable and true

to everyday life. However, in certain scenarios like dances, weddings and others, characters use slightly heavier makeup to align with particular scenes or settings. In one of the interviews, Balu Mahendra stated that he preferred the oily texture of the skin that glows under lights and looks more aesthetic and pleasing than having a flat, touched-up face.

4.3.3.7 Ornaments of the Women Protagonists

The use of ornaments among the women protagonists in Balu Mahendra films is measured and the results are presented in Table 4.8. Two categories of ornaments were tested such as subtle jewelry and extravagant accessories. Subtle jewelry refers to the minimal use of ornaments that are in line with real life. Extravagant accessories refer to the use of more ornaments to look grand and unrealistic in places.

Table 4.8 Ornaments of the Women Protagonists

S.No	Film	Artist Name	Subtle Jewelry	Extravagant Accessories
1.	Azhiyadha Kolangal	Shobha	Yes	
2.	Moodu Pani	Shobha	Yes	
3.	Moondram Pirai	Sridevi	Yes	
4.	Neengal Kettavai	Archana	Yes	
5.	Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthal	Madhavi	Yes	
6.	Rettai Vaal Kuruvi	Archana	Yes	
7.	Rettai Vaal Kuruvi	Radhika	Yes	Yes
8.	Veedu	Archana	Yes	
9.	Sandhya Raagam	Archana	Yes	
10.	Vanna Vanna Pookkal	Mounika	Yes	Yes

11.	Vanna Vanna Pookkal	Vinodhini	Yes	
12.	Marupadiyum	Revathi	Yes	Yes
13.	Marupadiyum	Rohini	Yes	Yes
14.	Sathi Leelavathi	Heera	Yes	
15.	Sathi Leelavathi	Kalpana	Yes	Yes
16.	Sathi Leelavathi	Kovai Sarala	Yes	Yes
17.	Raman Abdullah	Rudhra	Yes	
18.	Raman Abdullah	Easwari Rao	Yes	
19.	En Iniya Ponnillave	Mounika	Yes	
20.	Julie Ganapathy	Ramya Krishnan	Yes	Yes
21.	Julie Ganapathy	Saritha	Yes	
22.	Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam	Priyamani	Yes	
23.	Thalaimuraigal	Ramya Shankar	Yes	

The result shows that just like makeup, women in Balu Mahendra's films are styled with subtle jewelry (very minimal ornaments). The subtle or minimal ornaments include nose pins, thin chains, studs or earrings and simple bangles or watches. This look is predominantly carried by almost all the characters in all the films. This maintains the realism of the characters, making them true to life. Except for a few scenes, where characters wear extravagant accessories (heavy jewelry) like two big chains, long earrings or jhumkas with a lot of bangles, headpieces, anklets and others for a celebration or occasion or a dance number. Only seven out of the 23 characters wore Extravagant accessories (heavy ornament) in a few scenes, including Rohini in Marupadiyum, who is shown as an actress in the film wearing heavy ornaments for the shoots, while the other 15 characters were seen only with Subtle jewelry (minimal accessories). In a few instances

Radhika, Mounika, Rohini, Kalpana, Kovai Sarala and Ramya Krishnan wore extravagant accessories. But those are associated with the scene and that demands it.

4.3.4 Representation of Women Protagonist In Scenes

Representation of women protagonists in scenes is measured through the scene setting, the use of a naturalistic approach, the lead characters of the film, the number of scenes and the times the lead character appeared in films. These parameters will help to understand the screen space provided to the women protagonist in the Balu Mahendra films.

4.3.4.1 Setting of the movie/scenes

Balu Mahendra often sets his movies in real and relatable environments. This plays an important part in connecting with the character's origin and brings out the nativity of the place. In this research, the movie setting of Balu Mahendra was analyzed based on two major categories such as urban and rural. The result is highlighted in Fig. 4.9.

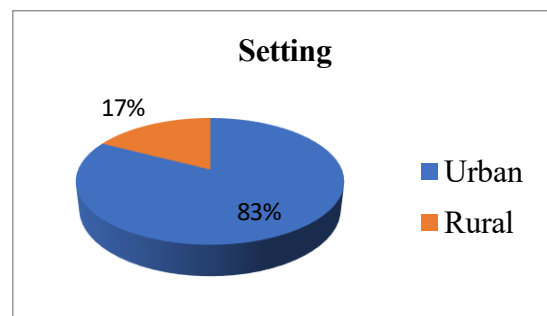


Fig. 4.9 Setting

The result found that the settings explored in the Balu Mahendra films include both urban and rural backgrounds, enhancing the diverse social-cultural life. Urban settings often show middle-class life, with scenes in homes, offices and public spaces that establish everyday life and its challenges. In contrast, rural settings in his films establish the simplicity and beauty of village life and traditional values and customs. 4 out of 23 characters/scenes are set in rural areas, while the other 19 are set in urban areas.

Additionally, Balu Mahendra films are known for having sequences in hilly regions showcasing the vast scenic mountains and the life around them. For example, *Moodu Pani*, *Moondram Pirai*, *En Iniya Ponnilave* and *Julie Ganapathy* have a major part of the movie shot in hilly cities like Ooty. Balu Mahendra's choices of the setting don't just elevate the storytelling aspect but also enhance the authentic portrayal of the less explored places and environment for the problems faced by the women characters.

4.3.4.2 Naturalistic Approach in Film Making

Balu Mahendra is renowned for his naturalistic approach to filmmaking. The stories taken by Balu Mahendra in his films mostly resemble real-life issues. The female characters are also developed in such a way that they face real-life issues and act with realism. This type of storytelling is highlighted in movies like *Veedu*, *Marupadiyum* and others.

His framing of women characters is relatable, with their actions and dialogues reflecting true-life experiences and emotions. Unlike other films during the time of his direction, the songs in Balu Mahendra films aren't set in foreign locations or graphically generated. They fit along with the story's arc and don't deviate the audience from its plot. The subtle performances of the characters avoid melodrama and handle the scene in nuance, with required emotional expressions. The film and characters in his films constantly avoid exaggerated characters or performances, unrealistic plot lines, overpolished landscapes and extensive special effects, establishing Balu Mahendra's unique niche in cinema.

4.3.4.3 Women Protagonists & their Presence in Balu Mahendra Films

This section presents information related to the women protagonists in Balu Mahendra films and the utilization of such characters in the scenes. This information helps to understand how the women protagonists are represented and utilized in his movies. The consolidated results are presented in Table. 4.9.

Table 4.9 Lead Character and their usage in films

S.No	Film Name	Duration of the film	Lead Character	No. of scenes lead protagonist appeared	Minutes Protagonist appeared
1.	Azhiyadha Kolangal	100 minutes	Indumathi	37	29 minutes
2.	Moodu Pani	131 minutes	Rekha	32	52 minutes
3.	Moondram Pirai	134 minutes	Bhaaki/Viji	26	71 minutes
4.	Neengal Kettavai	132 minutes	Radha	12	27 minutes
5.	Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthal	130 minutes	Padma	31	20 minutes
6.	Rettai Vaal Kuruvi	133 minutes	Thulasi	41	48 minutes
7.	Rettai Vaal Kuruvi	133 minutes	Radha	36	48 minutes
8.	Veedu	108 minutes	Sudha	40	85 minutes
9.	Sandhya Raagam	84 minutes	Thulasi	23	39 minutes
10.	Vanna Vanna Pookkal	116 minutes	Shenbagam	26	27 minutes
11.	Vanna Vanna Pookkal	116 minutes	Manoranjini	41	53 minutes
12.	Marupadiyum	139 minutes	Thulasi	49	88 minutes
13.	Marupadiyum	139 minutes	Kavitha	24	31 minutes

Contd...

14.	Sathi Leelavathi	151 minutes	Priya	61	53 minutes
15.	Sathi Leelavathi	151 minutes	Leelavathi	23	38 minutes
16.	Sathi Leelavathi	151 minutes	Pazhani	10	21 minutes
17.	Raman Abdullah	137 minutes	Ayesha	22	14 minutes
18.	Raman Abdullah	137 minutes	Gowri	79	27 minutes
19.	En Iniya Ponnilave	113 minutes	Rosie	94	67 minutes
20.	Julie Ganapathy	142 minutes	Vijaya	54	20 minutes
21.	Julie Ganapathy	142 minutes	Julie Ganapathy	20	69 minutes
22.	Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam	150 minutes	Thulasi	44	37+ 3 minutes (as childhood)
23.	Thalaimuraigal	100 minutes	Stella	25	23 minutes

The result shows that the duration of the films varies from 84 minutes (Sandhya Raagam) to 151 minutes (Sathi Leelavathi). The protagonist's screen time varies significantly, with some leads appearing for a large portion of the film, while others have limited presence.

The highest women protagonist screen time is in Marupadiyum (88 minutes) which is 63.3% of the overall film duration, Veedu (85 minutes) which is 78.7% of the overall duration, En Iniya Ponnilave (67 minutes) which is 59.3% of the overall duration, Moondram Pirai (71 minutes in 134-minute film, 53%) and Julie Ganapathy (69 minutes in a 142-minute film, 48.5%). This shows that the women protagonists had a strong presence in Balu Mahendra's films.

The films where the women protagonists appeared in the most scenes are En Iniya Ponnillave – Rosie (94 scenes, 67 minutes of screen time), Raman Abdullah – Gowri (79 scenes, but only 27 minutes of screen time), Sathi Leelavathi – Priya (61 scenes, 53 minutes of screen time), Julie Ganapathy – Vijaya (54 scenes, but only 20 minutes of screen time), Marupadiyum – Thulasi (49 scenes, 88 minutes of screen time). The films where the women protagonists had limited presence are Raman Abdullah – Ayesha (14 minutes in a 137-minute film, 10.2%), Raman Abdullah – Gowri (27 minutes in a 137-minute film, 19.7%), Neengal Kettavai – Radha (27 minutes in a 132-minute film, 20.5%), Thalaimuraigal – Stella (23 minutes in a 100-minute film, 23%), Sathi Leelavathi – Pazhani (21 minutes in a 151-minute film, 13.9%).

Some of the films feature two lead protagonists, with one having significantly higher screen time than the other. They are Rettai Vaal Kuruvi – Thulasi (41 scenes, 48 minutes) vs. Radha (36 scenes, 48 minutes), Vanna Vanna Pookkal – Manoranjini (41 scenes, 53 minutes) vs. Shenbagam (26 scenes, 27 minutes), Marupadiyum – Thulasi (49 scenes, 88 minutes) vs. Kavitha (24 scenes, 31 minutes), Sathi Leelavathi – Priya (61 scenes, 53 minutes) vs. Leelavathi (23 scenes, 38 minutes).

Dramatic and emotional films tend to have a higher protagonist screen presence, as seen in Veedu – A film centered around a woman's struggles with home ownership (85 minutes of screen time), Marupadiyum – A film about a woman dealing with betrayal and self-discovery (88 minutes of screen time), Moondram Pirai – A classic film focusing on a woman with memory loss (71 minutes of screen time), Comedy and multi-character films have more divided screen time, seen in Sathi Leelavathi – Multiple leads share screen time (Leelavathi appears for only 38 minutes in a 151-minute film), Raman Abdullah – Two leads (Ayesha and Gowri) have low individual screen time, suggesting multiple subplots.

In certain special cases such as Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam – The protagonist (Thulasi) appears for 44 scenes and 37 minutes, plus an additional 3 minutes as a child, indicating a flashback-based storytelling structure. In Sathi Leelavathi features three protagonists (Priya, Leelavathi and Pazhani), each with varied screen time, indicating a film with multiple perspectives.

4.3.5 Character Development of Women Protagonist

Balu Mahendra makes a specific effort to portray each character as distinctive from the others in his films, giving them a varied backstory, attitudes, character arcs, diamonds and traits. This combination of these attributes makes the character stand out and be recognizable to the audience. In this section, the character development of women protagonists concerning the attitude, character arc, character trait and character diamond are analyzed and the results are presented.

4.3.5.1 Attitude of the Women Protagonist Character

Balu Mahendra's characters are mostly portrayed as strong, independent and intellectual. 8 out of 23 characters are considered brave. Julie in Julie Ganapathy, Kavitha in Marupadiyum and Sudha in Veedu are a few examples of women who are shown as outspoken, confident and ready to make daring decisions. However, they are also shown vulnerable in their struggles and self-discovery. 14 out of 23 are shown as humble. Thulasi in Rettaivaal Kuruvi, Manoranjini in Vanna Vanna Pookkal and Rosie in En Iniya Ponnillave are shown as women who have a feeble voice, are soft and are emotionally dependent. This depth of portraying strengths and flaws makes the character more relatable for the audience.

4.3.5.2 Character Arc of the Women Protagonist

The female protagonists in the film are analyzed through five major types of character arcs. They are positive arc, fall arc, transformational arc, flat arc and Growth Arc. The positive arc shows how a character flawed through the audience's view learns through the process, interaction and events and grows positively, rising beyond their flaws. The fall arc shows how a character develops into a flawed negative alter through the journey in the story. The flat arc shows how the character's place and position in the movie do not change much and remain the same in the journey. The transformative arc shows how a character goes through a major change from a regular person to a hero, either personally or for the world, by realizing his inner strength and power. Out of 23 women protagonists, only 16 first lead women protagonists in Balu Mahendra Films were tested in terms of character arc, character trait and character diamond. Each of the women protagonist characters was chosen and analyzed how the journey of the character travels throughout the story. This

defines the character arc of the women protagonists present in Balu Mahendra films. It is found from Fig. 4.10, that 39% of the women protagonists fall under a flat character arc followed by 30% in a transformative arc, 22% positive arc and 9% of the characters resembled in the fall arc.

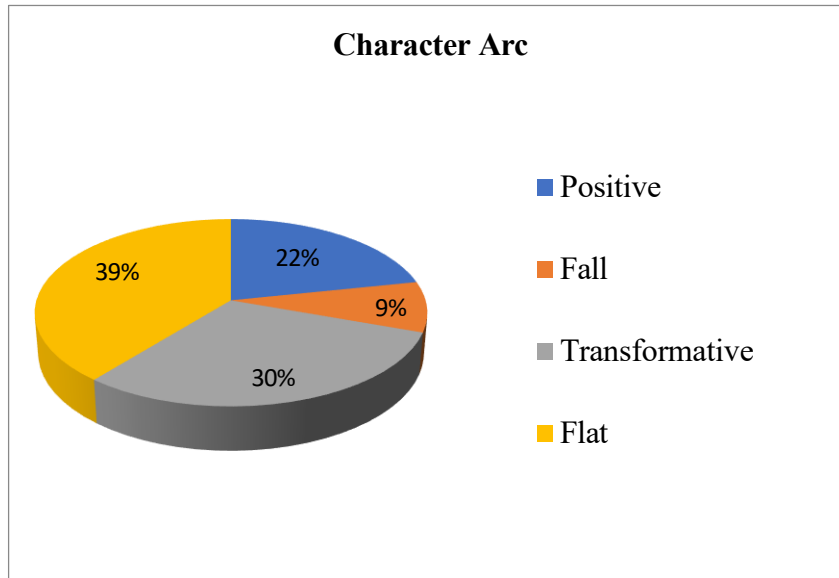


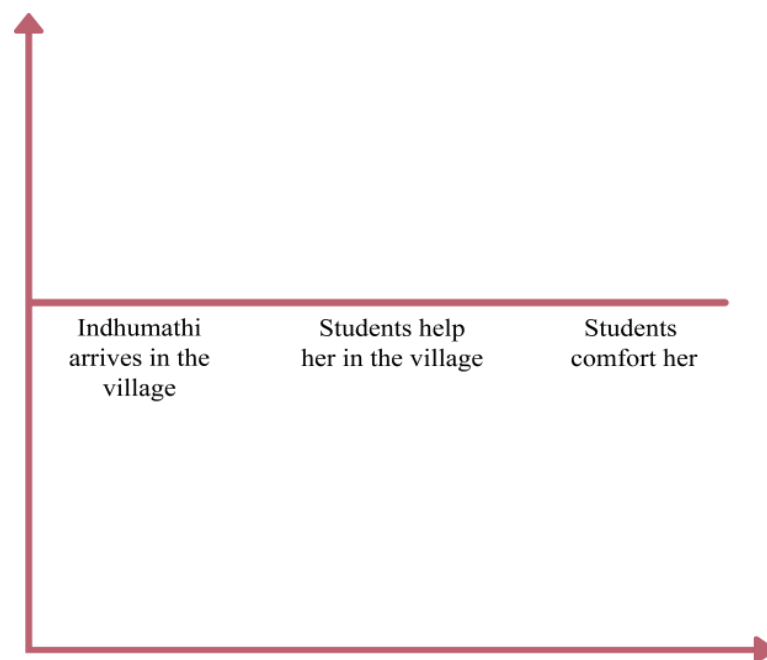
Fig. 4.10 Character Arc of the Women Protagonists

Seven women protagonists such as Indumathi from *Azhiyadha Kolangal*, Radha from *Neengal Kettavai*, Padma from *Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthal*, Gowri from *Raman Abdullah*, Rosie from *En Iniya Ponnillave*, Vijaya from *Julie Ganapathy* and Stella from *Thalaimuraigal* have represented in flat arc structure. Transformative arc structure was used for the women protagonists such as Rekha from *Moodu Pani*, Viji from *Moondram Pirai*, Thulasi from *Rettai Vaal Kuruvi*, Thulasi from *Sandhya Raagam* and Thulasi from *Marupadiyum*. Three women protagonists such as Sudha from *Veedu*, Leelavathi from *Sathi Leelavathi* and Thulasi from *Adhu Oru Kana Kaalamare* represented with a positive character arc structure. Only one woman protagonist such as Manoranjini from *Vanna Vanna Pookkalis* represented with a fall arc structure.

Apart from understanding the category of character arc representation of each women protagonist, it is also important to analyze how the character arc was applied to the respective women protagonists in the story. The next section explains how the women protagonists are characterized throughout the films representing the character arc.

1. Indumathi, Azhiyadha Kolangal

Indumathi from Azhiyadha Kolangal is represented with the flat character arc structure (Fig. 4.11). It is represented in the films as Indumathi arrives in the village knowing no one except her aunt. Three students, who develop a crush on her, help her and make her feel at home in the village. As she settles in, she starts to enjoy the village life after her long- distance boyfriend arrives. Indu desires to settle down in the village with him. She resolves the silly fights with the students and starts caring for them. In the end, the bond between Indu and her students strengthens when the boys offer her comfort after the loss of one of their classmates. In this representation, there is no growth or fall. The character was designed subtly.



Flat Arc - Indhumathi, Azhiyaadha Kolangal

Fig. 4.11 Character Arc of Indhumathi

2. Rekha, Moodu Pani

Rekha from Moodu Pani Film was represented with a transformative character arc structure (Fig. 4.12). Rekha is portrayed as a happy-go-lucky girl, who becomes emotionally weak when her friend goes missing during a visit. She is found lost in thought as the police look for her friend. When the psycho Chandru kidnaps her, Rekha realizes she can no longer be emotional. She pretends to be interested in Chandru and waits for the

perfect moment to escape. Her character transforms from being carefree to experiencing a similar struggle as her friend to finding strength and intelligence for her freedom.

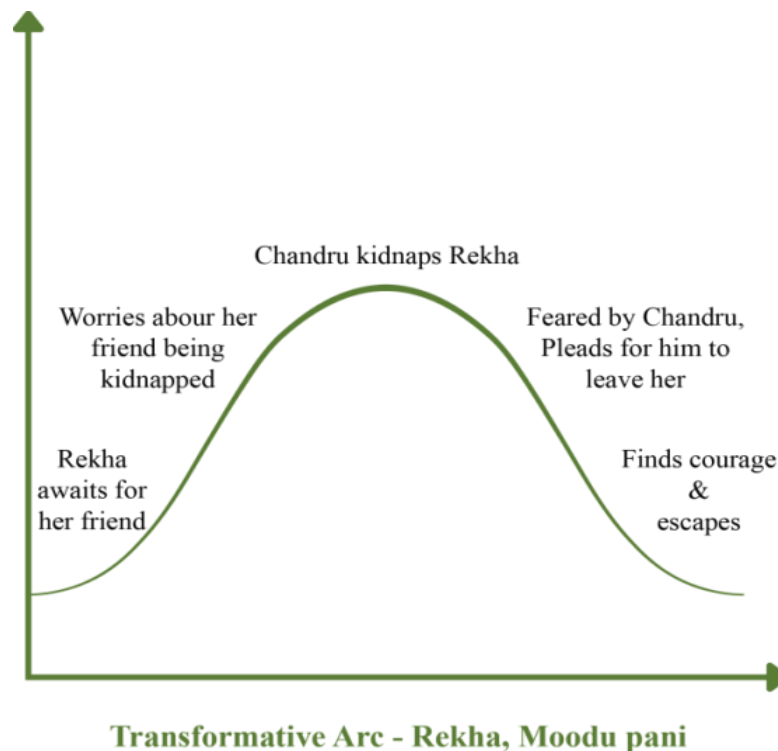
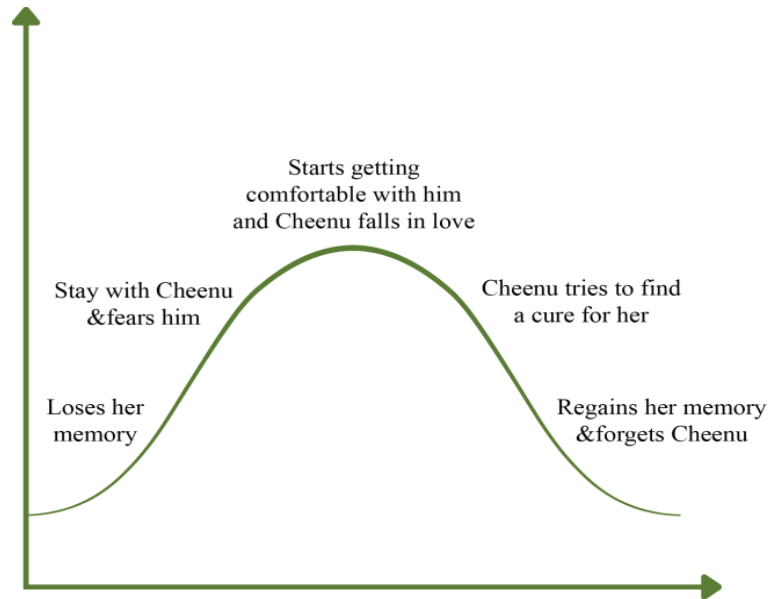


Fig. 4.12 Character Arc of Rekha

3. Viji, Moondram Pirai

Viji from Moondram Pirai film was represented with a transformative character arc structure (Fig. 4.13). After losing her memories, the character Bhaaki transforms into Viji, who has the mentality of a six-year-old and feels uneasy and afraid around Cheenu. She develops a close relationship with the community and its residents over time, particularly with the neighbor's old lady. Viji's physical proximity to Cheenu demonstrates how their relationship changes from one of dread to comfort. She feels safer around him as her trust in him grows. But all of Viji's recollections of Cheenu and her village life are lost when she regains her memory as Bhaaki. From losing her memory to regaining it and moving on to lead a happy life with the lost family represents the transformation and the character Viji represented throughout.

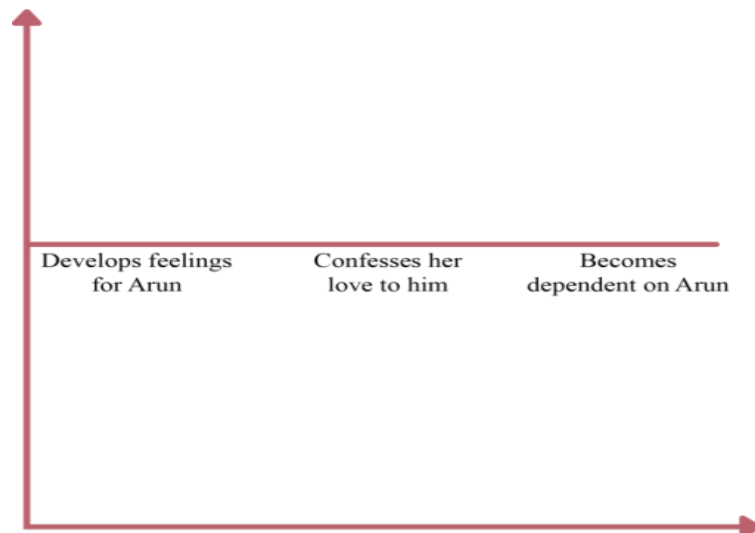


Transformative Arc - Viji, Moondram Pirai

Fig. 4.13 Character Arc of Viji

4. Radha, Neengal Kettavai

Radha's character arc from Neengal Kettavai's film is flat (Fig. 4.14), with no big changes except her feelings for Arun, whose looks she admires. Initially, she has interactions and cute fights, which gradually grow into affection for him. After she confesses her feelings, she starts to take care of him and becomes emotionally dependent on him.



Flat Arc - Radha, Neengal Kettavai

Fig. 4.14 Character Arc of Radha

5. Padma, Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthal

Padma's character arc from Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthal is represented in a flat structure (Fig. 4.15), revealing her strong bond with her brother and her excitement for her wedding with Ravi. The loss of her brother in a tragic event puts her through tough times. Ravi spends more time with Padma, offering her comfort and support. She starts caring for him and when put in danger with the rogues, she waits for Ravi to save her.

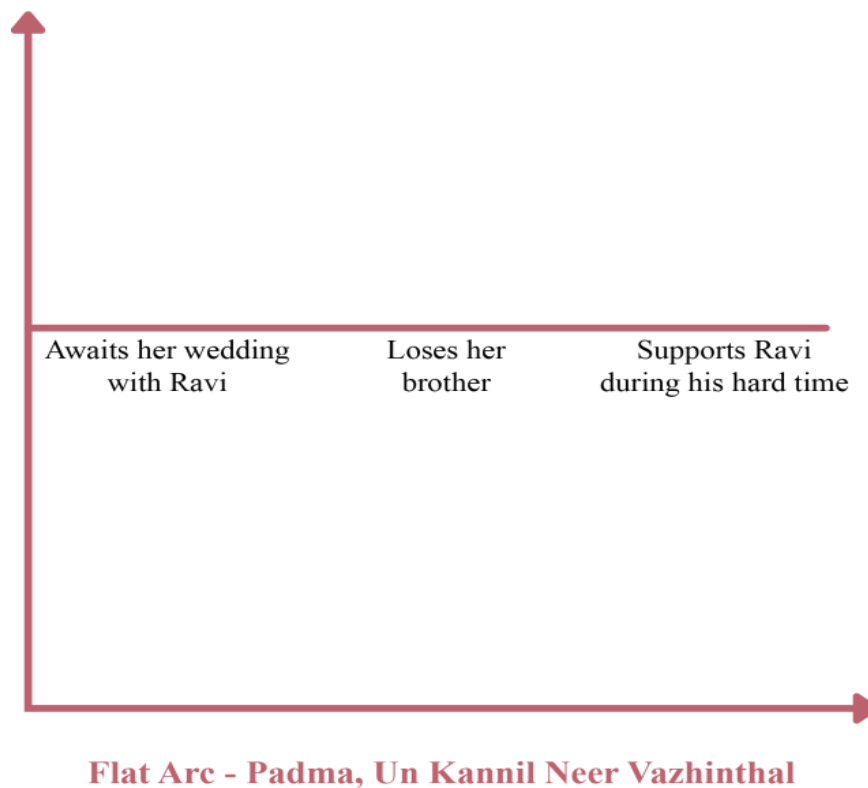


Fig. 4.15 Character Arc of Padma

6. Thulasi, Rettai Vaal Kuruvi

Thulasi from Rettai Vaal Kuruvi is represented with a transformative character arc (Fig. 4.16) through her journey from a naive, trusting person to a painful realization and acceptance. Thulasi is portrayed as a shy woman who deeply loves her husband, Gopi. Gopi's actions become questionable and with her suspicions, she discovers his affair with singer Radha. She struggles with the betrayal and finds it difficult to accept the situation. Finally, Thulasi chooses to forgive Gopi with a climax that shows Thulasi and Radha raising their children together.

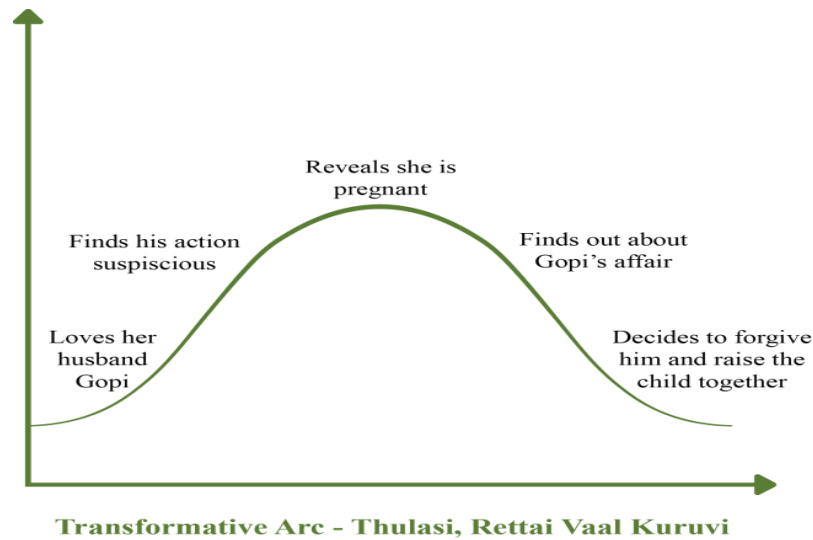


Fig. 4.16 Character Arc of Thulasi

7. Sudha, Veedu

Sudha from the Veedu movie is represented with a positive arc (Fig. 4.17) that shows how Sudha raises against all the odds to build her home after all her struggles. Initially, she wants to find a rental house for no more than 500 rupees for her family. When she couldn't find one, her ambition of building her own house grew, spending over 1.5 lakhs. Initially, Sudha is hesitant to ask her boyfriend for money, but she eventually asks when the situation demands it. With money constantly on her mind, she even checks the price of a gift from her boyfriend. Towards the end, she grows independent to build her own house even after facing the loss of her grandfather.

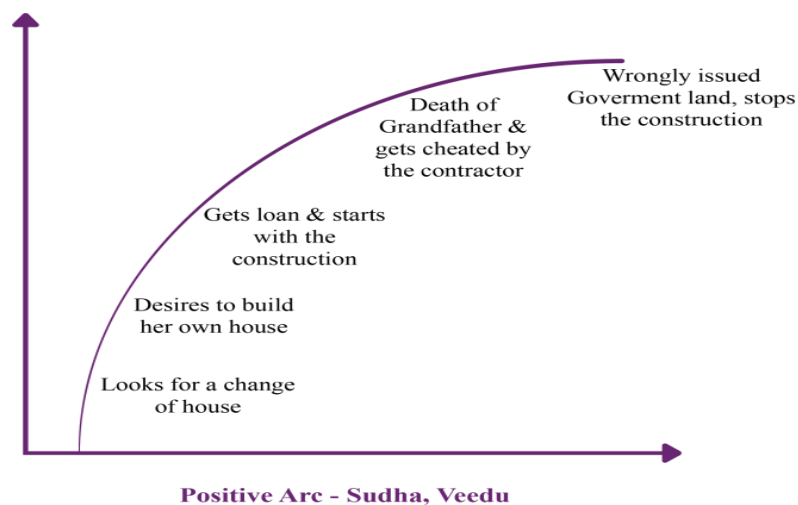


Fig. 4.17 Character Arc of Sudha

8. Thulasi, Sandhya Raagam

Thulasi from Sandhya Ragam movie follows a transformation arc (Fig. 4.18) as she initially thinks Chokkalingam (father-in-law) visits her home as a financial burden to develop a stronger bond. He helps her out and shows affection toward her daughter and Thulasi begins to understand and appreciate his presence. After an argument with Chokkalingam she feels guilty and when he leaves, she reaches out to him, apologizing and asking him to return home.

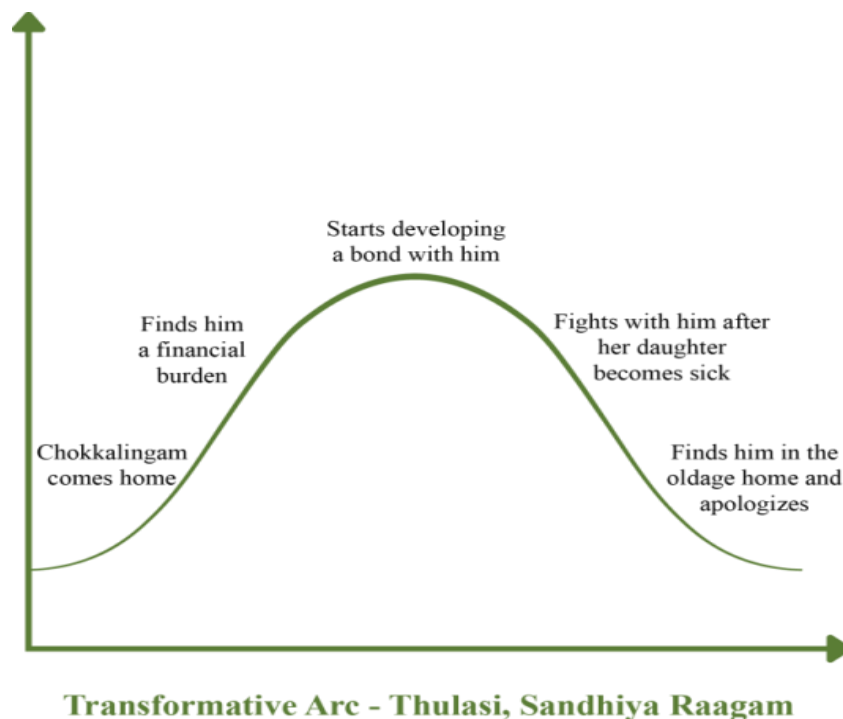


Fig. 4.18 Character Arc of Thulasi

9. Manoranjini, Vanna Vanna Pookkal

Manoranjini's from Vanna Vanna Pookkal character is a fall arc (Fig. 4.19), where she leaves her home and stays near the forest, seeking comfort and security. When Shiva arrives she receives the attention and care she longs for but hesitates to go to his home. Upon realizing that Shiva has plans to marry her. But Manoranjini reveals that she only seeks a casual relationship because she suffers from a malicious disease and expires.

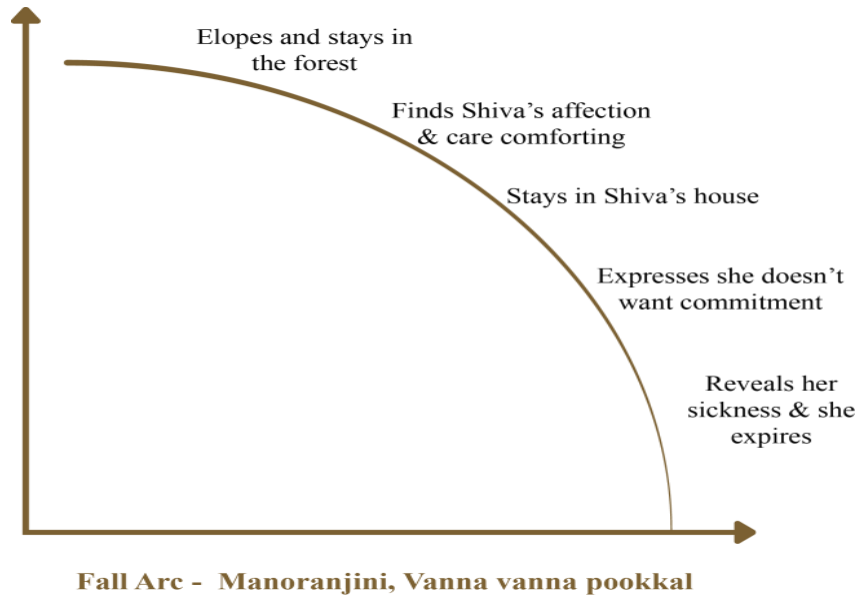


Fig. 4.19 Character Arc of Manoranjini

10. Thulasi, Marupadiyum

Thulasi's arc is transformative (Fig. 4.20), where in the beginning she is portrayed as a woman who enjoys being a housewife to Murali. She becomes deeply frustrated when she knows that her maid is being abused by her husband and having an affair. She faces abuse just like her maid, making a call to leave her home and live alone after discovering Murali's affair. She transforms into a character who pleads for her husband to return to growing into an independent woman who rebuilds her life. In the end, when her friend proposes to marry him, she rejects, explaining her desire to live without a surname.

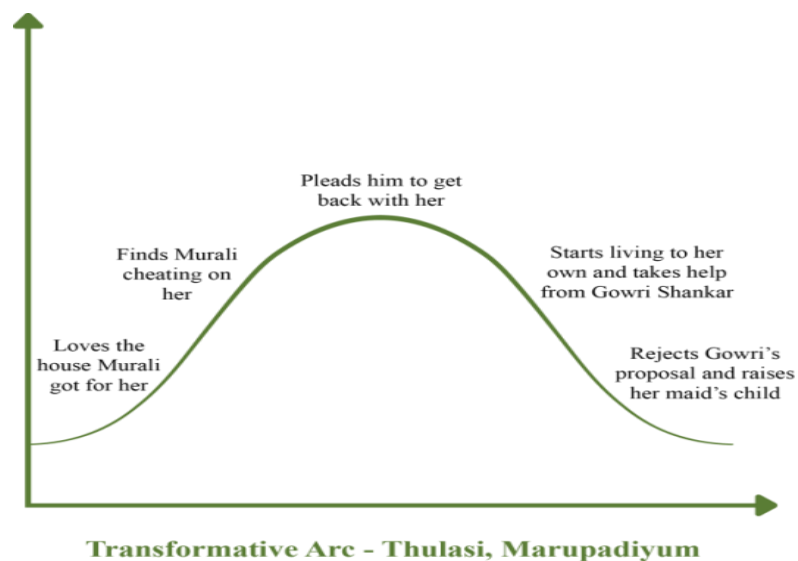


Fig. 4.20 Character Arc of Thulasi

11. Leelavathi, Sathi Leelavathi

Leelavathi from Sathi Leelavathi movie follows a positive arc structure (Fig. 4.21). She is completely dependent on her husband in the initial part of the story because of her insecurities. Initially, she believed everything her husband told her was based on love. She changes her way of dressing and tries to get the attention of her unloving husband, but she can't win him over. However, when her husband leaves her, the betrayal leads her to become wise, devise strategies and seek revenge by sending her children to live with Priya. Towards the end, based on her wise decisions she reunites with her husband.

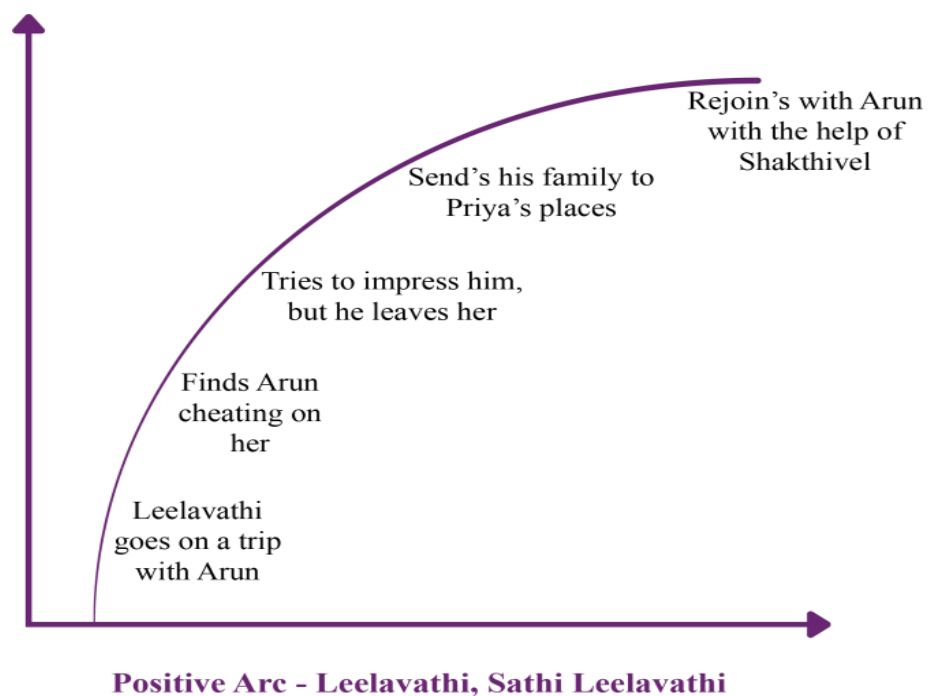


Fig. 4.21 Character Arc of Leelavathi

12. Gowri, Raman Abdullah

Gowri from Raman Abdullah is represented with a flat arc structure (Fig. 4.22). Gowri's character doesn't show much change in the story. She supports her Muslim friend despite her brother's disapproval of their friendship due to their religion. She doesn't approve of the thought of religion coming in between friendships. As she grows closer to Raman, who is disguised as Abdullah, she finds the truth and falls in love with him. Her arc shows her commitment to those she loves even risking her life for their happiness.

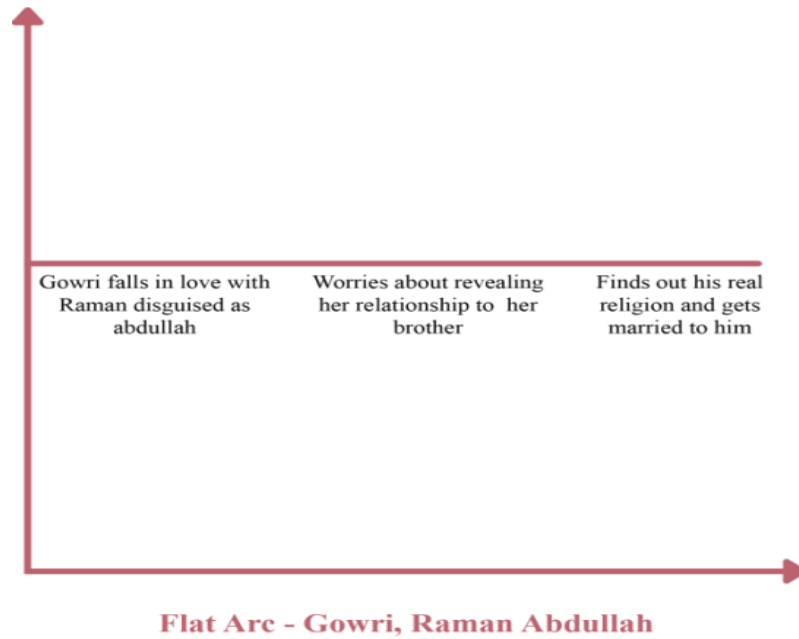


Fig. 4.22 Character Arc of Gowri

13. Rosie, En Iniya Ponnilave

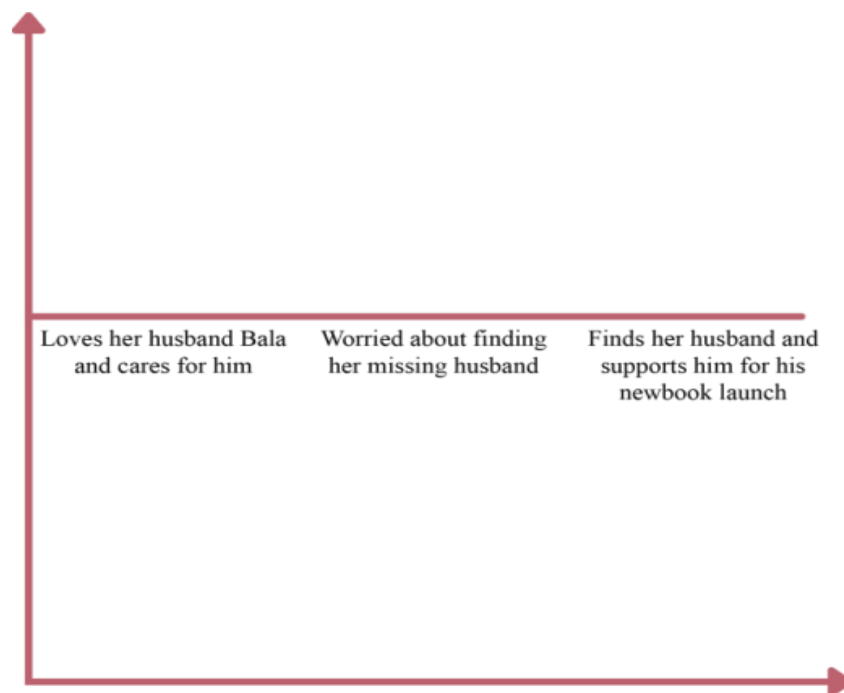
Rosie's character from En Iniya Ponnilave has followed the flat arc structure (Fig. 4.23). Rosie's story follows a wealthy girl who falls in love with Shiva, a lower middle-class man. After getting pregnant, her family sends her to a hostel. Rosie elopes with Shiva and they live in a small space. After their daughter is born, she fights with Shiva to be more involved in raising the child. Problems arise when a neighbor shows interest in Shiva and their daughter goes missing. In the end, Rosie turns to her family for comfort.



Fig. 4.23 Character Arc of Rosie

14. Vijaya, Julie Ganapathy

Vijaya from Julie Ganapathy's film is represented with a flat arc structure (Fig. 4.24). It is centered on her successful husband. Her life is shown as a supporting, humble wife who is waiting for him to return from a trip and to celebrate their child's birthday together. When she comes to know that he is missing, she makes every effort to find him safe by filing a complaint and persistently waiting for his return. In the end, after his return, she supports him in the launch of his book.

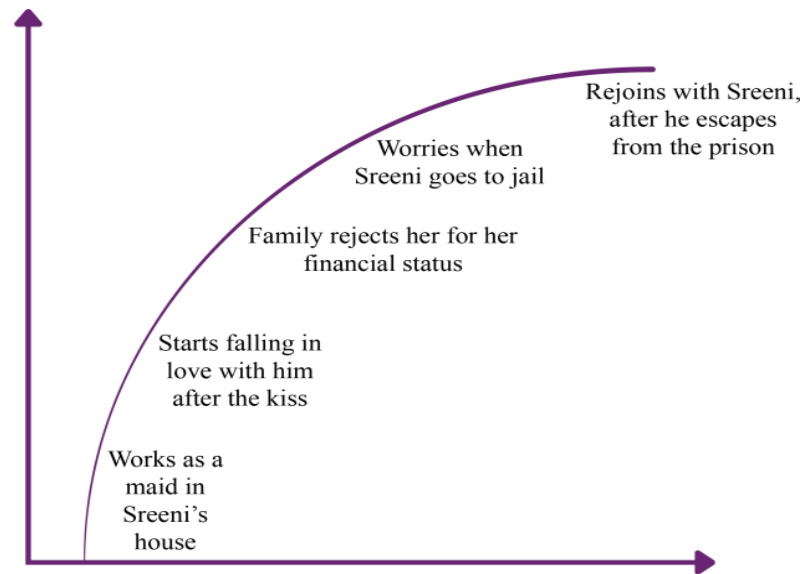


Flat Arc - Vijaya, Julie Ganapathy

Fig. 4.24 Character Arc of Vijaya

15. Thulasi, Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam

Thulasi from Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam is represented with a positive arc structure (Fig. 4.25). The story of Thulasi begins with hesitation as she works as a maid in Sreeni's house. After a conversation, they share a kiss and she develops feelings for him when he apologizes. Sreeni's parents disapprove of their love due to her financial situation. Thulasi plans to elope, but Sreeni is jailed after a fight. She waits for years and when his mother dies, he escapes prison to find her. The police, understanding their situation, help them reunite.

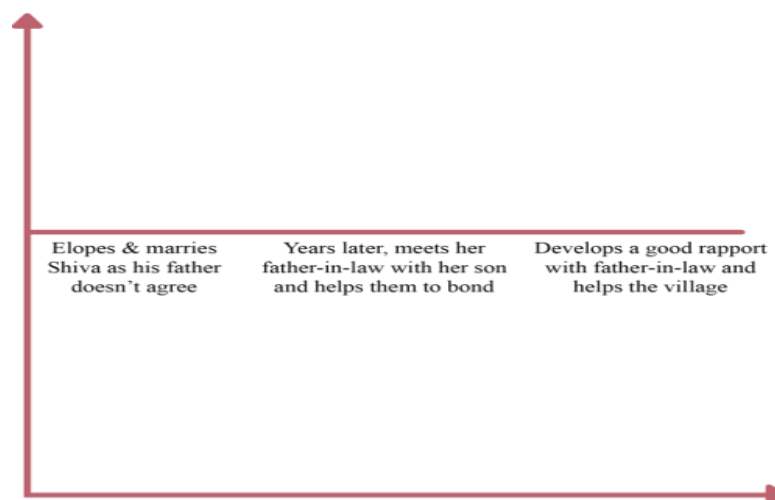


Positive Arc - Thulasi, Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam

Fig. 4.25 Character Arc of Thulasi

16. Stella, Thalaimuraigal:

Stella is represented in a fall arc (Fig. 4.26) where her real true character is understood by her father-in-law, who put her through a lot of trouble as she is not from their religion. Facing challenges in her relationship with him initially, he realizes that language and religion don't come as barriers in a bond after bonding with his grandson. Stella not only supports her son in building a bond with his grandfather by asking him to learn Tamil and communicate with him but also suggests building a hospital in their village. She treats everyone equally and tries to improve their village.



Flat Arc - Stella, Thalaimuraigal

Fig. 4.26 Character Arc of Stella

Balu Mahendra's films present a diverse range of character arcs for female protagonists, with the majority falling under flat or transformative arcs. These arcs highlight different ways in which female characters navigate their stories, whether by influencing those around them, undergoing significant growth or facing personal downfalls.

The flat arc (39%) was the most common, showing strong, unwavering women who maintain their values despite challenges. The transformative arc (30%) followed, showcasing women who undergo deep personal growth due to life-changing experiences. Positive arcs (22%) demonstrated perseverance and overcoming adversity, while fall arcs (9%) illustrated tragic character developments.

This analysis sheds light on how female protagonists are shaped in Balu Mahendra's films, revealing a nuanced approach to character development that challenges conventional portrayals of women in Balu Mahendra's Films.

4.3.5.3 Character Trait of the Women Protagonist

The women characters in Balu Mahendra films exhibit a diverse range of traits, from being emotionally dependent and shy to being bold, independent and progressive toward others. Each character's traits are analyzed with the way the characters express their emotions and interact with the other characters by adding complexities to the personalities of the characters. The Common Character Traits in female protagonists are Resilience and Strength (Women characters overcoming challenges), Empathy and Nurturing (Roles highlighting caregiving and intelligence) Wit (Women using their intellect to navigate situations) and Vulnerability and Emotional Depth (Showcasing internal struggles) (Buchanan, Settles and Woods 2019). In general, we can see the same traits expressed in various characters, but the combination of traits that each character upholds is different from the others. Characters like Indumathi from *Azhiyatha Kolangal*, Thulasi from *Marupadiyum* and Thulasi from *Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam* share similar character traits of being humble, supportive and emotional. Indumathi is known for treating everyone with respect, whereas Thulasi from *Marupadiyum* is known for being kind and vulnerable and Thulasi from *Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam* often feels too shy to share herself openly with others.

Rekha from Moodu Pani, Sudha from Veedu and Shenbagam from Vanna Vanna Pookkal have similar traits of being bold, empathetic and determined. Rekha is portrayed as a woman who is empathetic and determined to escape, whereas Sudha is shown as ambitious, persistent and stubborn towards her dream of building her home. Shenbagam is shown as possessive and determined in her relationship.

Viji from Moondram Pirai and Rosie from En Iniya Ponnillave are seen as naive and kind. Viji, with her condition, has a childlike curiosity about the things around her and Rosie, being a pregnant young adult, shows she is sensitive and childlike at heart when she is seen carrying a teddy bear when she leaves the hostel. Radha from Rettai Vaal Kuruvi and Priya from Sathi Leelavathi exhibit the traits of being independent. Priya, raised alone, values her independence and intelligence. While Radha is seen as a self-made woman, both show traits of falling for a married man. On the contrary, Padma from Un Kannil Neer Vazhindhal and Manoranjini from Vanna Vanna Pookkal are often seen as shy, reserved and dependent on their loved ones. Kavitha from Marupadiyum and Leelavathi from Sathi Leelavathi share common traits of being insecure and obsessive over their partners. Thulasi from Sandhya Raagam is practical and bold, approaching life sensibly just like Stella from Thalaimuraigal and Gowri from Raman Abdullah. Pazhani from Sathi Leelavathi and Julie from Julie Ganapathy stand out in their unique character traits that don't fit along with any other characters. Pazhani is seen carrying the trait of being humorous and bringing lightheartedness in conversations, whereas Julie is seen with a serious mental issue of being obsessive and stalking to the extent of captivating her favorite author.

4.3.5.4 Character Diamond of the Women Protagonist

The character diamond is a framework used to describe a character's four core attributes. They are Primary Strength - Humble and Respectful, Supporting Trait - Naive, Shadow Trait - Shy and Fatal Flaw - Unaware of Other's True Intentions (McKee's 1997). In this research, the women protagonist's character representation was analyzed based on these four character diamonds. The result of 16 primary women protagonist characters represented in Balu Mahendra film is presented below.

1. Indumathi, Azhiyadha Kolangal

The character diamond of Indhumathi, the first lead women protagonist in Azhiyadha Kolangal's film is illustrated in Fig. 4.27.

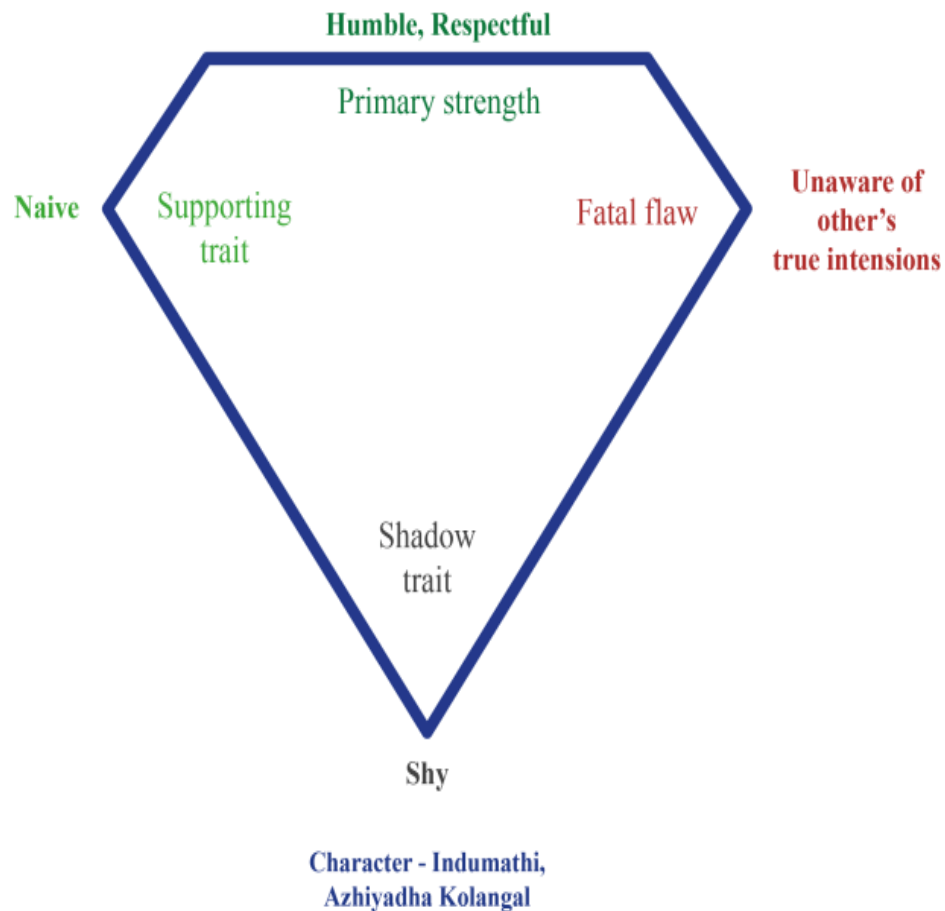


Fig. 4.27 Character Diamond of Indhumathi

Indumathi is seen as a humble and respectful person who easily connects with others which is considered as her strength. She seems to be innocent and naive and doesn't always see people's true intentions, especially with the students who like her. Although she is friendly, she has a shy side which is seen through her conversation with her boyfriend. She has the supporting trait which is witnessed in all the instances where she helps her students and others.

2. Rekha, Moodu Pani

The character diamond of Rekha, the first lead women protagonist in Moodu Pani Film is illustrated in Fig. 4.28.

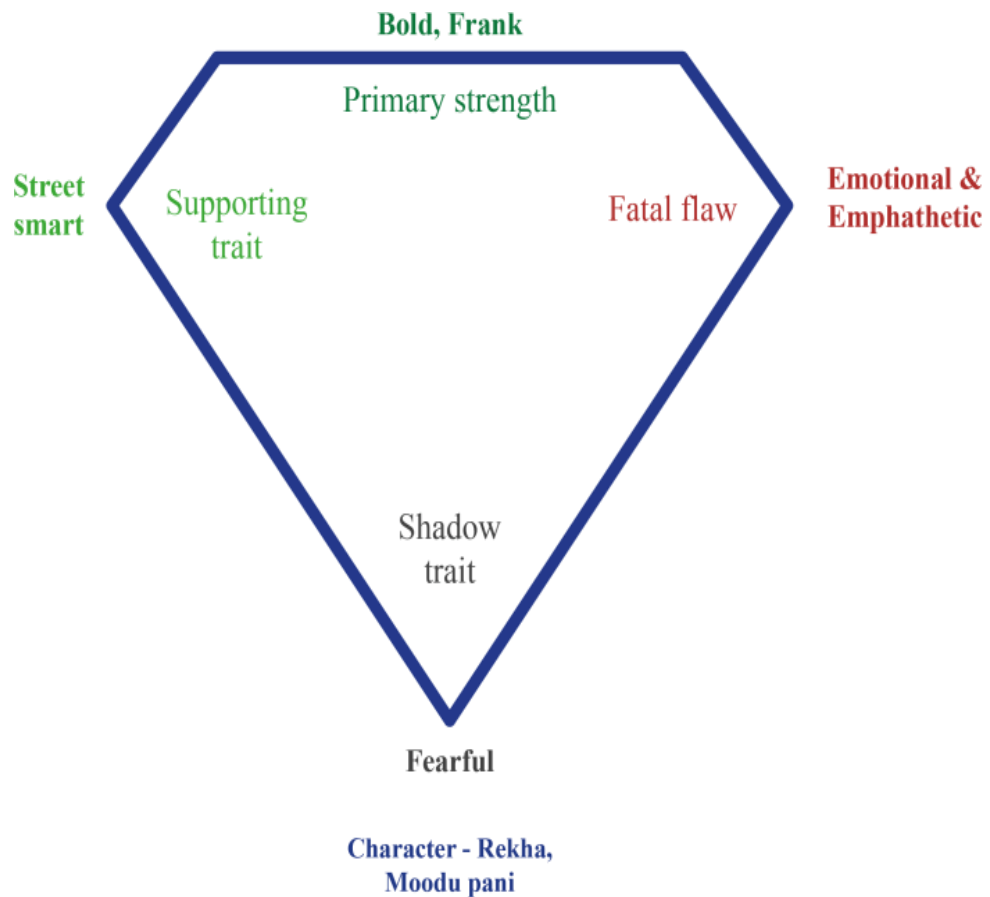


Fig. 4.28 Character Diamond of Rekha

Rekha is seen as a bold woman who speaks her mind but her weakness comes to light when her friends go missing based on how emotional she gets. Her innate fear seeks in when she is kidnapped. However, her character depicts how she can be smart despite being held captive.

3. Viji, Moondram Pirai

The character diamond of Viji, the first lead women protagonist in Moondram Pirai film is illustrated in Fig. 4.29.

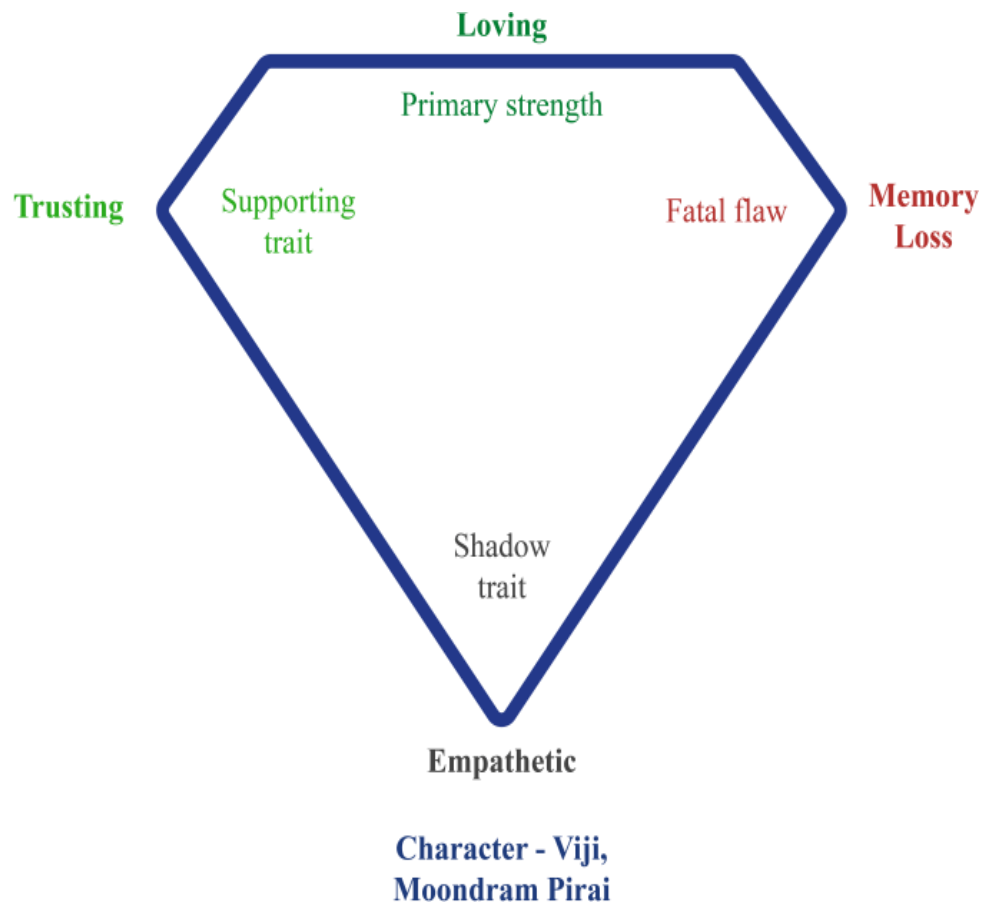


Fig. 4.29 Character Diamond of Viji

Viji's strength lies in her love for Cheenu, this leads her to trust him and rely on him easily. Her memory loss acts as the biggest flaw when she forgets everything and sees her lover as a stranger. Her desire to feed her pet dog Subramani despite not having dinner shows how empathetic she can be with others. Trusting everyone is the important supporting trait represented by Viji's character.

4. Radha, Neengal Kettavai

The character diamond of Radha, the first lead women protagonist in Neengal Kettavai's film is illustrated in Fig. 4.30.

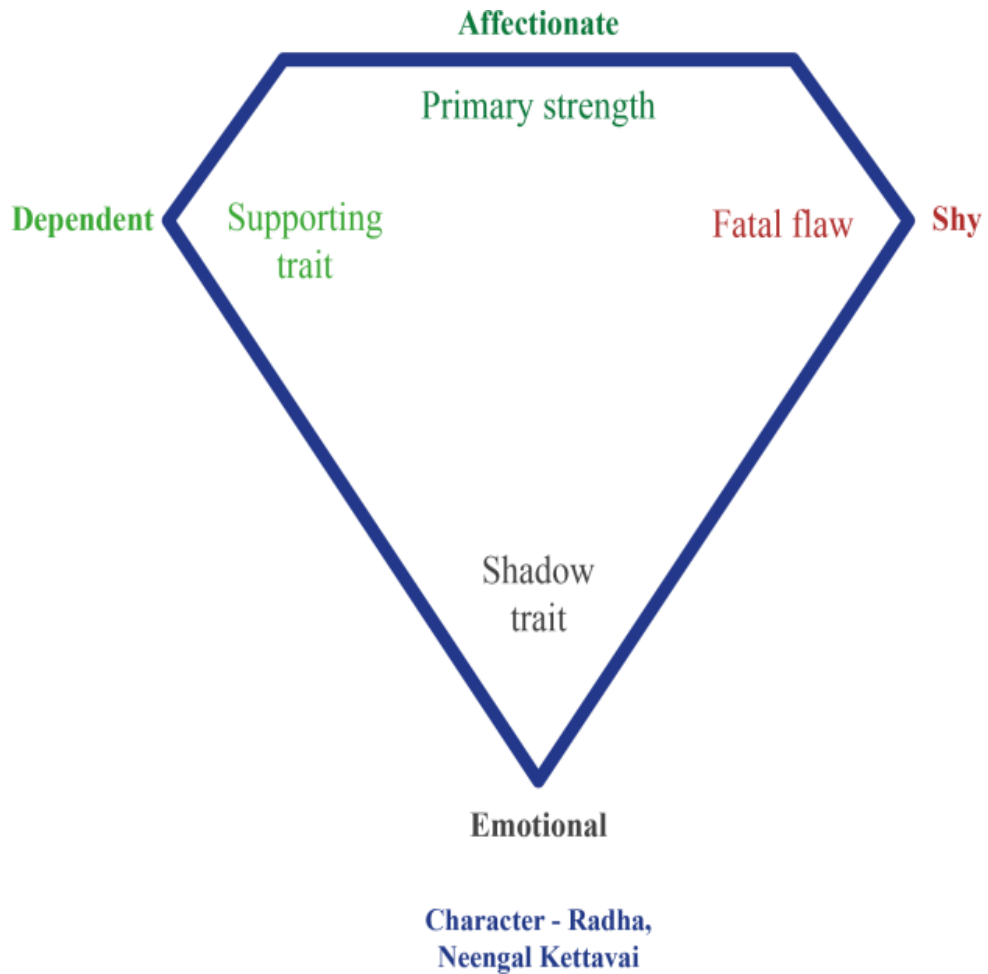


Fig. 4.30 Character Diamond of Radha

Not much is revealed about Radha except that she is shown as a person whose strength is the love she has for her friend. Being completely dependent on her boyfriend, she becomes too emotional, adding complexity to her character. She is shown as very dependent and shy in most of the scenes.

5. Padma, Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthaal

The character diamond of Padma, the first lead women protagonist in Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthaal's film is illustrated in Fig. 4.31.

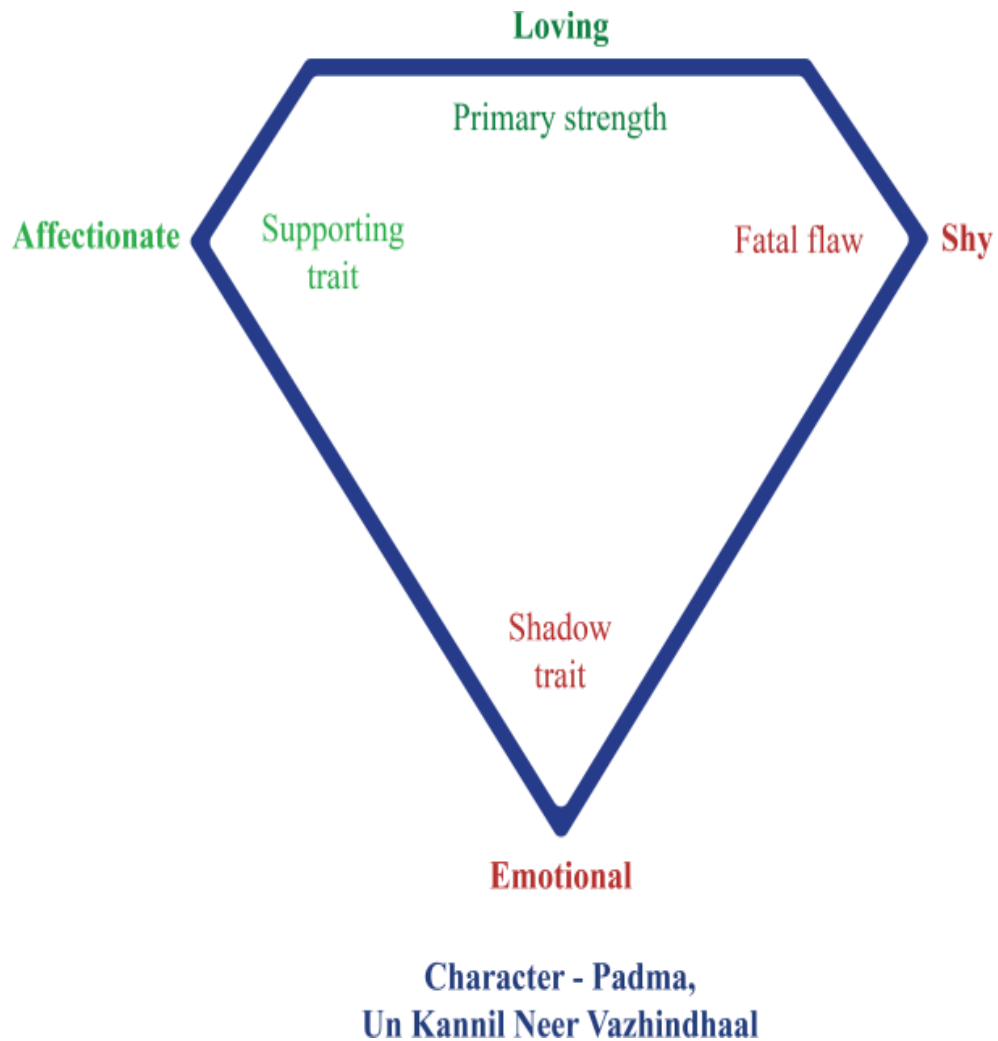


Fig. 4.31 Character Diamond of Padma

Padma's strength of being affectionate with her brother and brother acts as her strength. Despite being dependent on them, the loss of her brother reveals the emotional side making her vulnerable. Her fatal flaw is being shy in certain instances. Being the character's most affectionate, emotional concern is the shadow trait in representing Padma's character.

6. Thulasi, Rettai Vaal Kuruvi

The character diamond of Thulasi, the first lead women protagonist in Rettai Vaal Kuruvi Film was illustrated in Fig. 4.32.



Fig. 4.32 Character Diamond of Thulasi

Thulasi's character is centered on her trust & love for Gopi. Her character is set out to be completely dependent on him. She begins to notice suspicious behavior from Gopi, unaware of his true intentions which establishes her shadow trait of trusting easily. Her primary strength is shown as affectionate and that leads to the exposure of other traits.

7. Sudha, Veedu

The character diamond of Sudha, the first lead women protagonist in the Veedu Film is illustrated in Fig. 4.33.

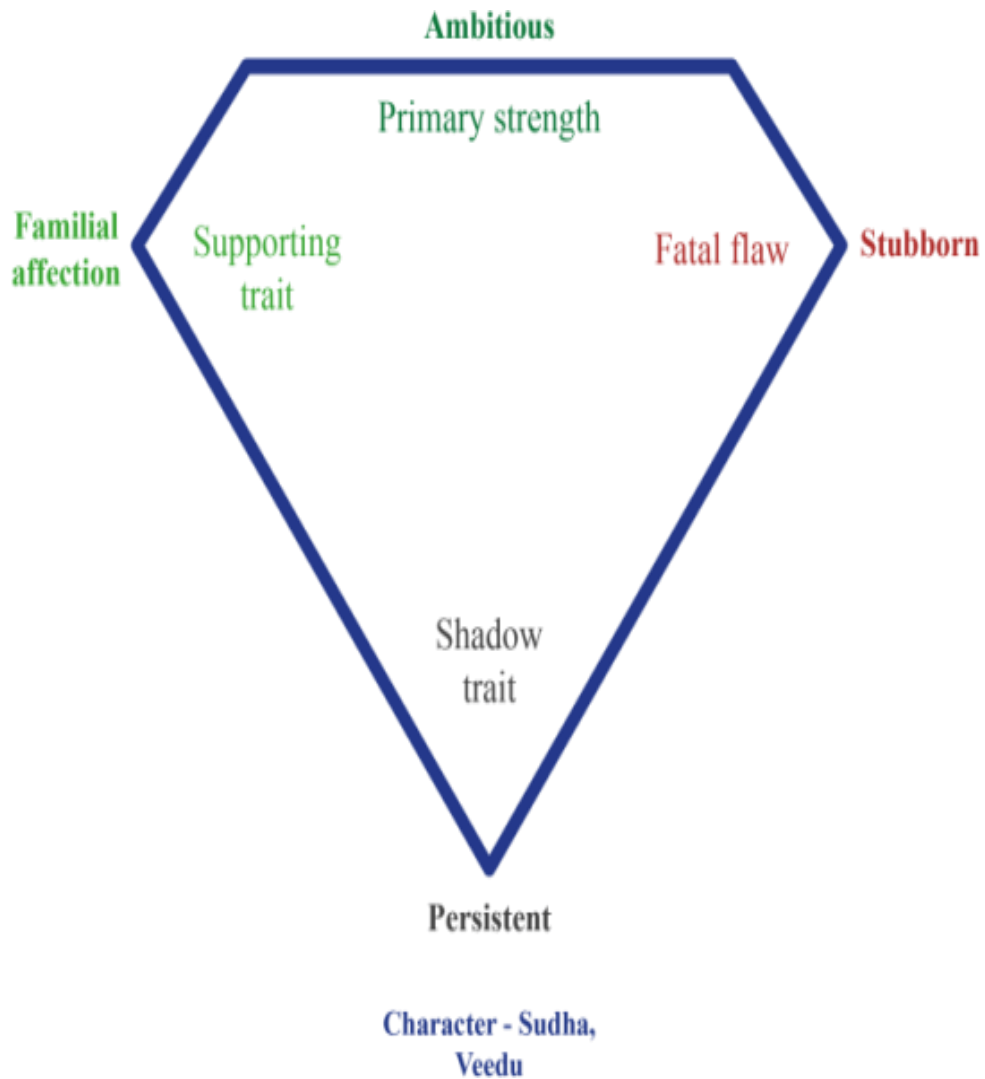


Fig. 4.33 Character Diamond of Sudha

Her determination toward her dream of building her own house is her main strength. The love of her family and boyfriend acts as a supporting trait enabling her to follow her ambitions. Her stubbornness acts as her flaw by not letting her mind think about the nuances of the issue but her persistent drive is the key to her success.

8. Thulasi, Sandhya Raagam

The character diamond of Thulasi, the first lead women protagonist in Sandhya Raagam's film is illustrated in Fig. 4.34.

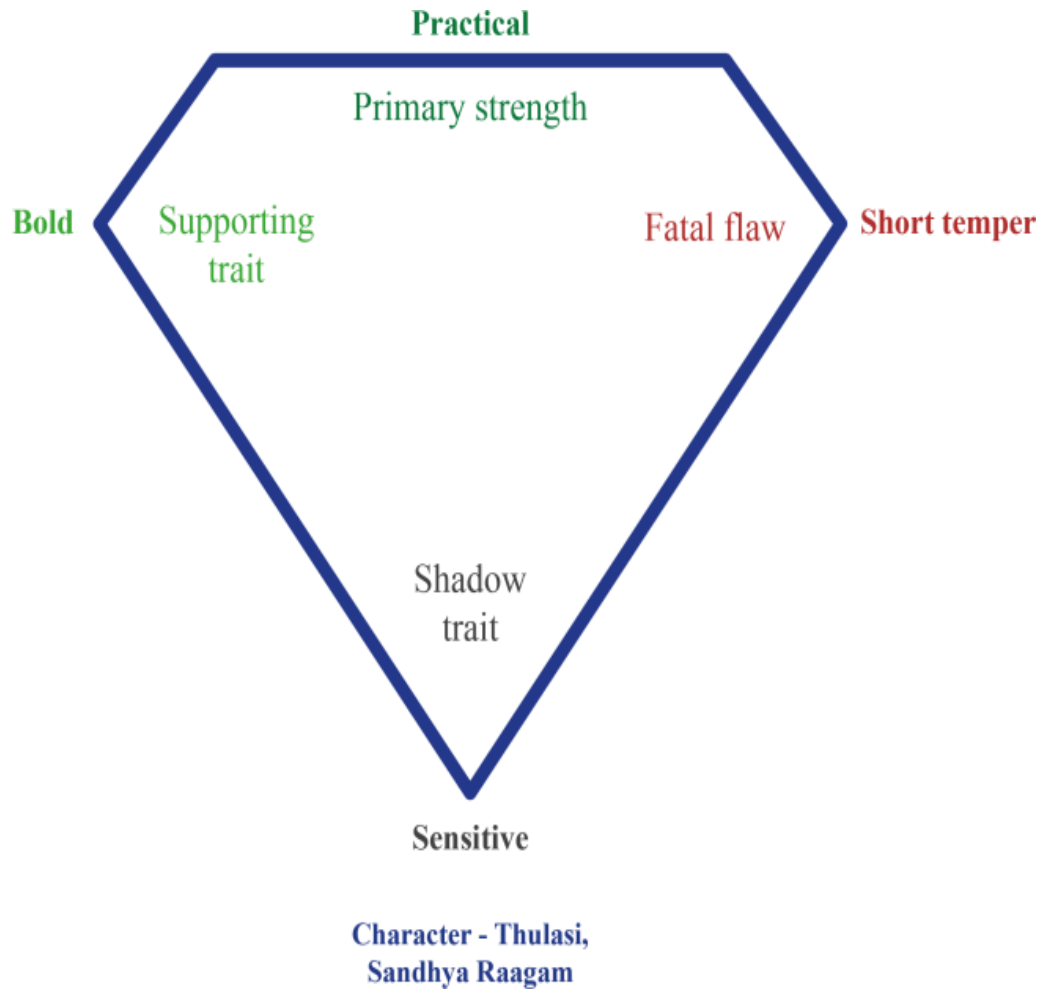


Fig. 4.34 Character Diamond of Thulasi

Understanding the financial situation of her family, Sudha acts as a character with bold and pragmatic views on situations. She is short-tempered when Chokkalingam puts her daughter in unexpected trouble. Although having a strong front, Sudha's guilt and apology show that she is sensitive.

9. Manoranjini, Vanna Vanna Pookkal:

The character diamond of Manoranjini, the first lead women protagonist in Vanna Vanna Pookal's Film was illustrated in Fig. 4.35.

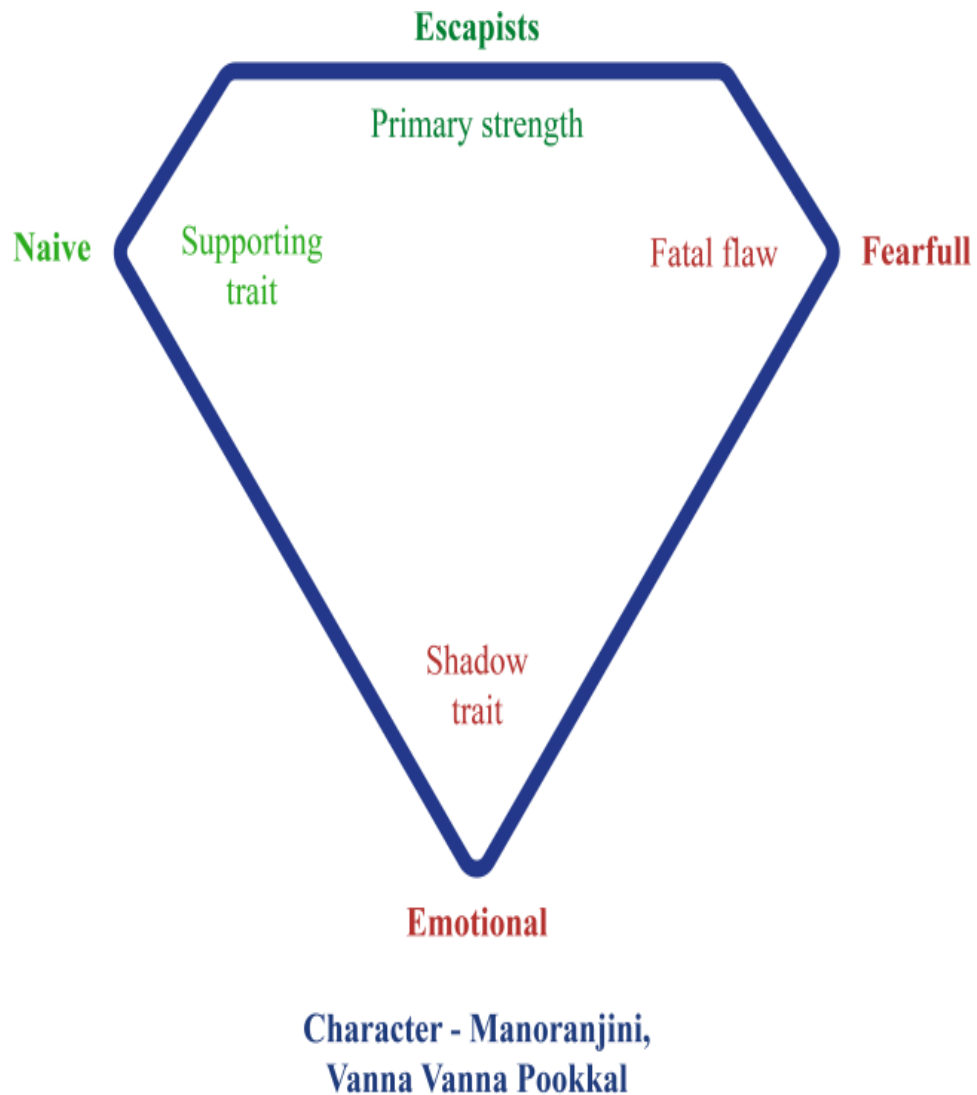


Fig. 4.35 Character Diamond of Manoranjini

Throughout the film, Manoranjini is seen as a character trying to escape from her problems with health and family. Although Manoranjini daringly leaves her house, she constantly fears what is happening in the forest. With Shiva's arrival and support, she becomes too emotional portraying her shadow trait.

10. Thulasi, Marupadiyum

The character diamond of Thulasi, the first lead women protagonist in the Marupadiyum film is illustrated in Fig. 4.36.

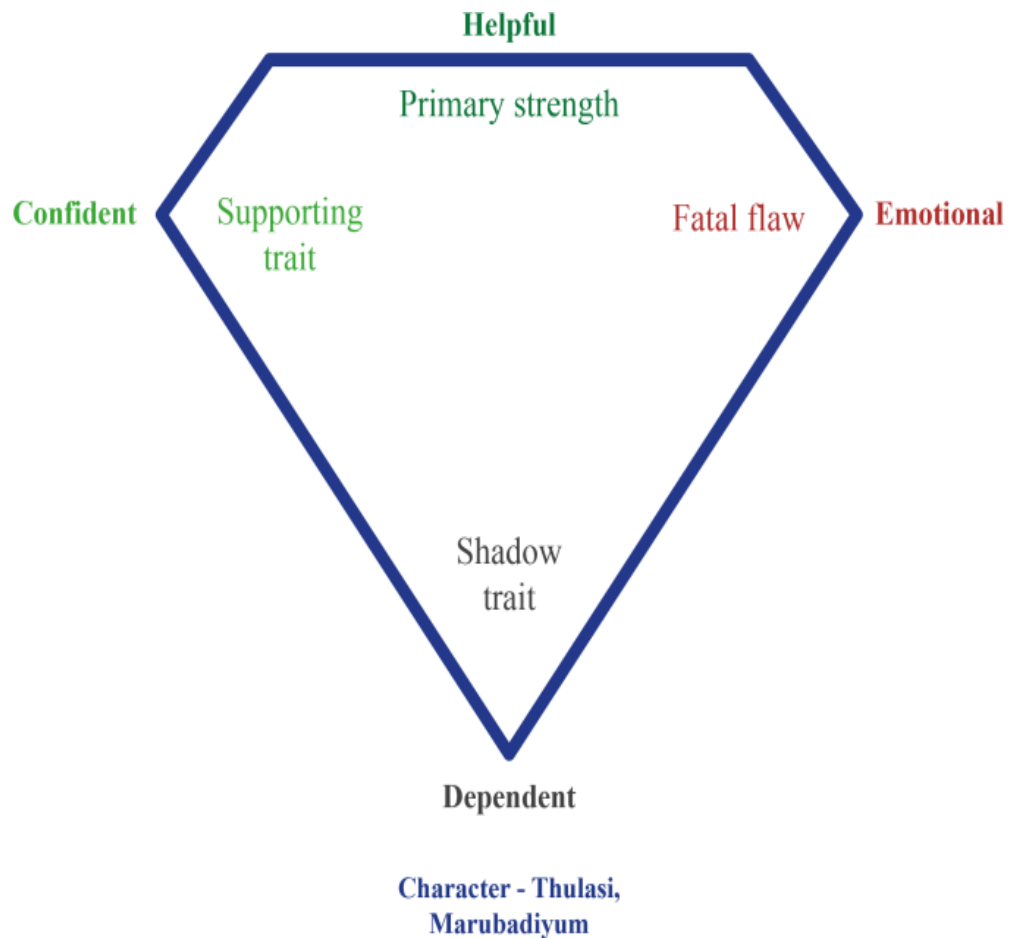


Fig. 4.36 Character Diamond of Thulasi

Thulasi is seen as a character who is selfless when it comes to helping others. Emotionally, losing her cool in front of Murali and his colleagues shows her fatal flaw. Despite being dependent on her husband all her life, his betrayal gave her the confidence to grow as the woman she wants to be which acts as a supporting trait.

11. Leelavathi, Sathi Leelavathi

The character diamond of Leelavathi, the first lead women protagonist in Sathi Leelavathi's film is illustrated in Fig. 4.37.

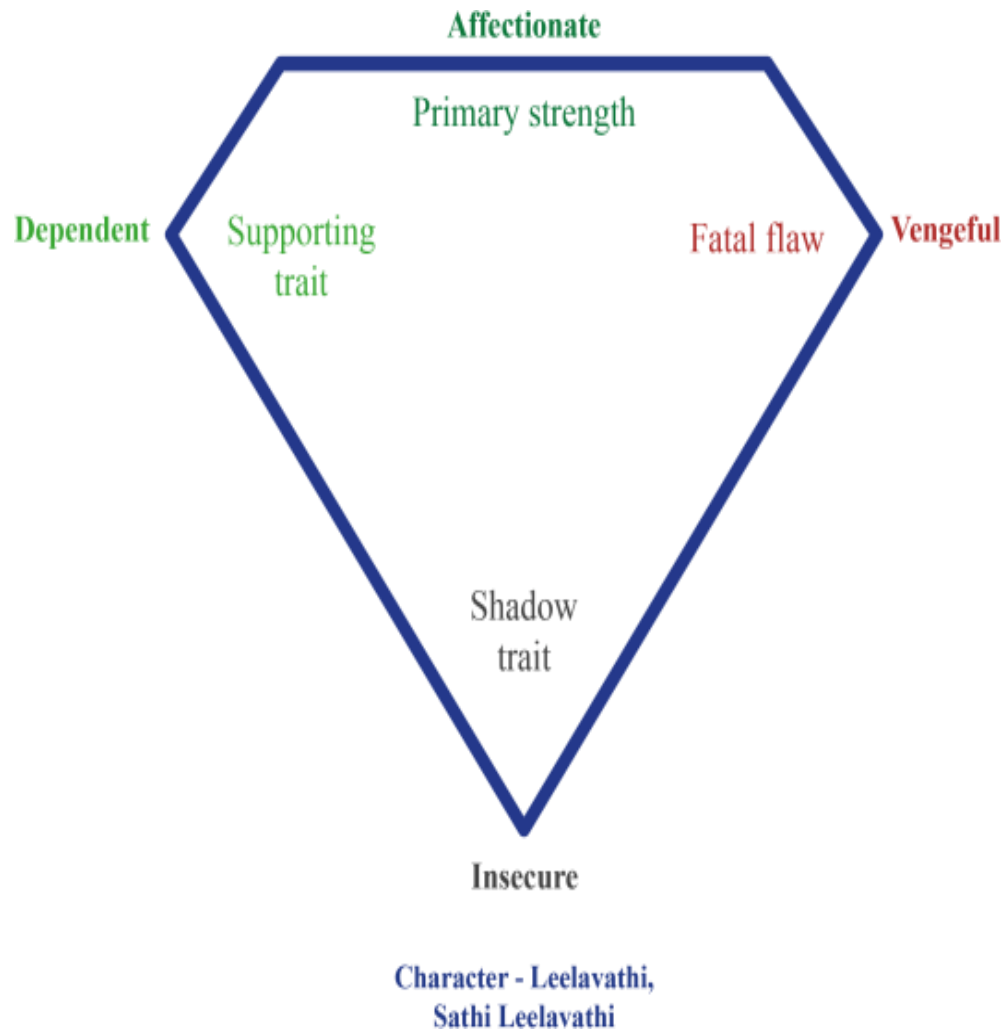


Fig. 4.37 Character Diamond of Leelavathi

Leelavathi's character is dependent entirely on her husband Arun. She is shown as very affectionate and that is her strength. The trust she had in him was shattered when she came to know about his affair bringing her the revengeful mindset. Her insecurity and desire to win back her husband are seen as shadow traits.

12. Gowri, Raman Abdullah

The character diamond of Gowri, the first lead women protagonist in Raman Abdullah Film is illustrated in Fig. 4.38.

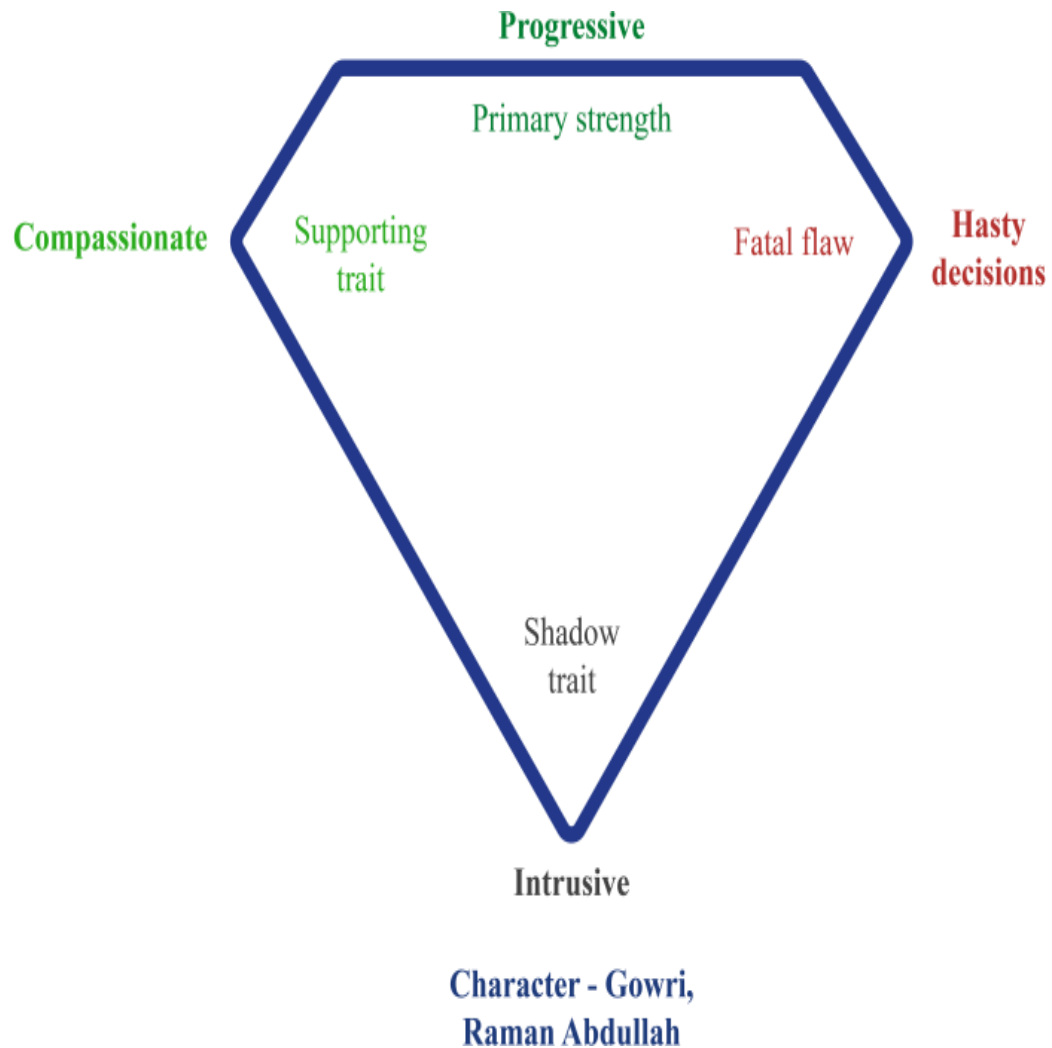


Fig. 4.38 Character Diamond of Gowri

Gowri's positive strength is her progressive nature in a regressive environment. Her compassion towards her Muslim friend is so strong that the bond can never be broken. Her intrusive nature to find Raman's past makes her jump into quick decisions.

13. Rosie, En Iniya Ponnilave

The character diamond of Rosie, the first lead women protagonist in En Iniya Ponnilave Film was illustrated in Fig. 4.39.

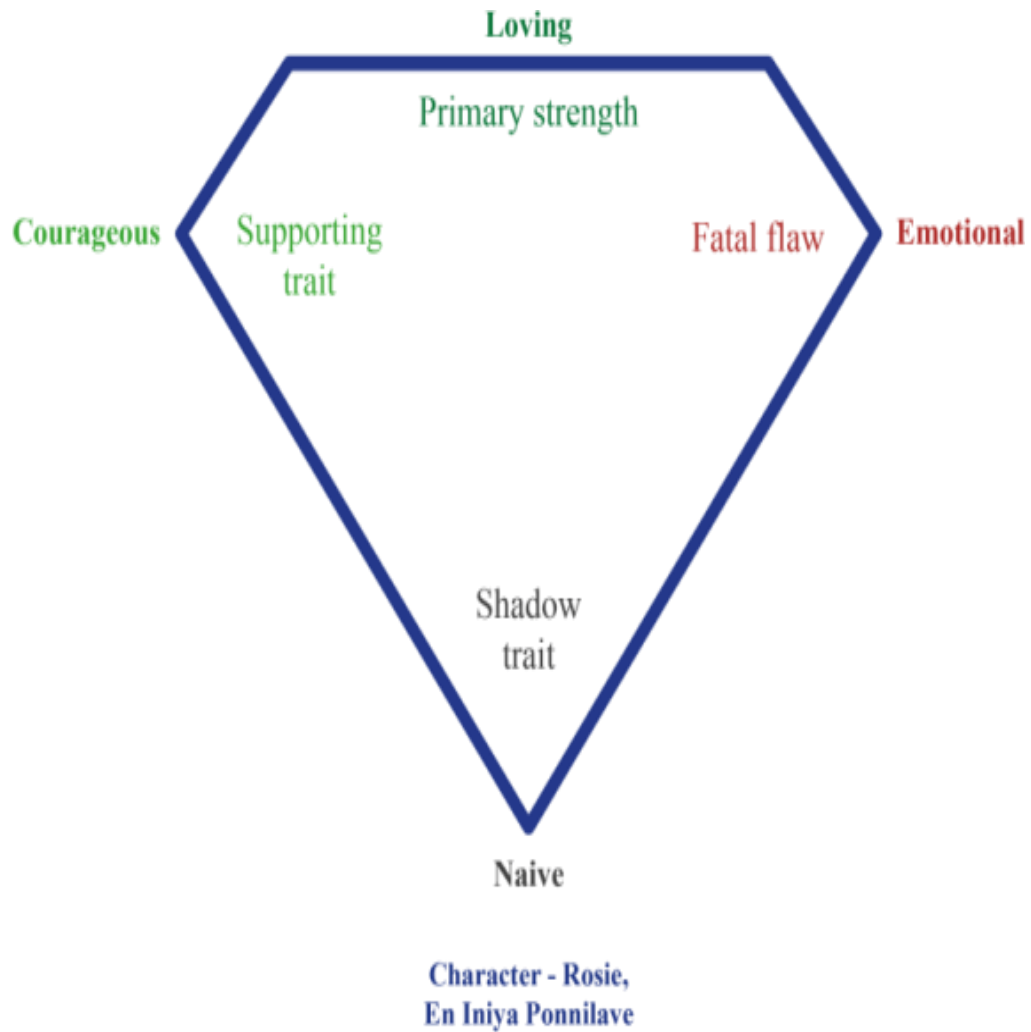


Fig. 4.39 Character Diamond of Rosie

Rosie's character goes to any extent for the person she loves. Her love and courage to leave her family at a young age shows her strength. Eloping at a young age makes her struggle for financial and familial needs establishing her naive and sensitive approach to life.

14. Vijaya, Julie Ganapathy

The character diamond of Vijaya, the first lead women protagonist in Julie Ganapathy 's Film is illustrated in Fig. 4.40.

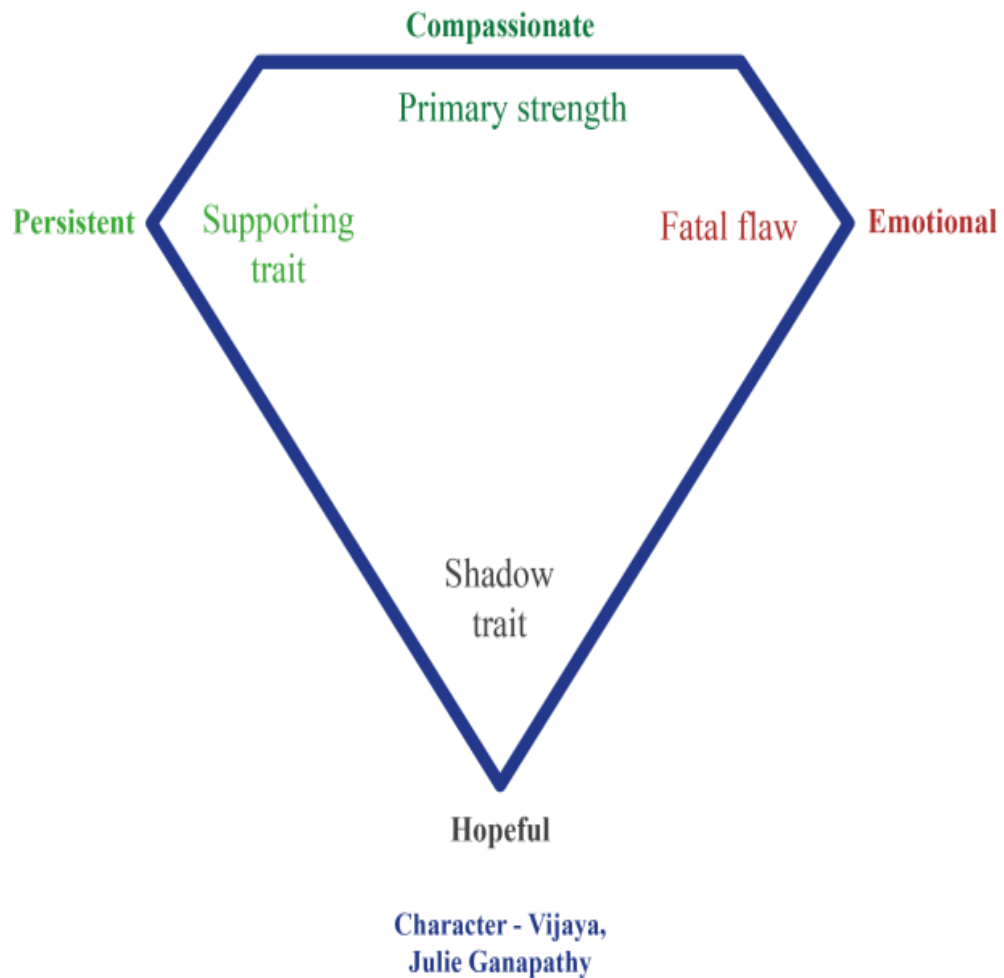


Fig. 4.40 Character Diamond of Vijaya

Vijaya is shown as a compassionate wife who doesn't lose hope in finding her husband. Her love for her husband and persistent effort in trying to find him act as her strength. However, her emotions act as a weakness in the process.

15. Thulasi, Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam

The character diamond of Thulasi, the first lead women protagonist in Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam Film is illustrated in Fig. 4.41.

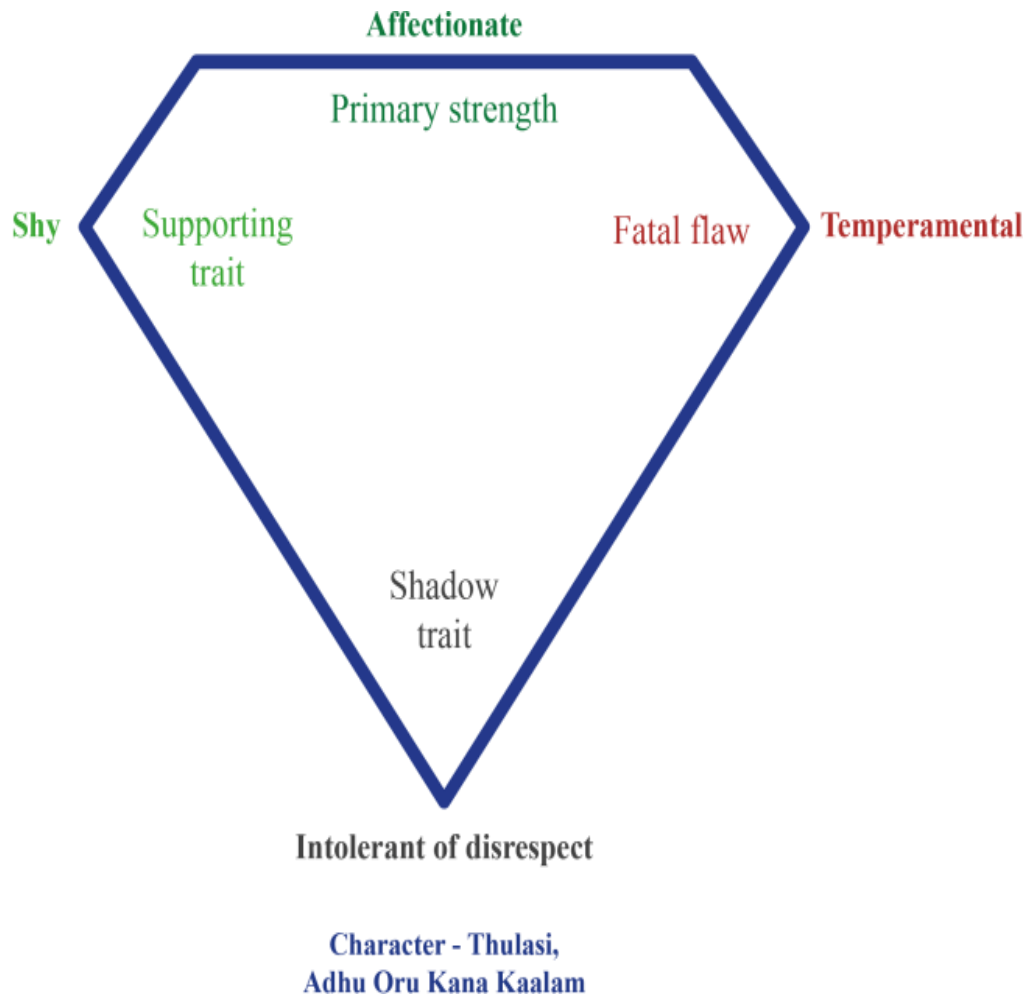


Fig. 4.41 Character Diamond of Thulasi

Thulasi's love for Sreeni acts as her primary strength. She shows her other side of being Shy and temperamental only with Sreeni. The difference in the family's financial position doesn't bother her. Thulasi doesn't take disrespect from anyone in her work and family's position at any cost.

16. Stella, Thalaimuraigal

The character diamond of Stella, the first lead women protagonist in Thalaimuraigal Film is illustrated in Fig. 4.42.

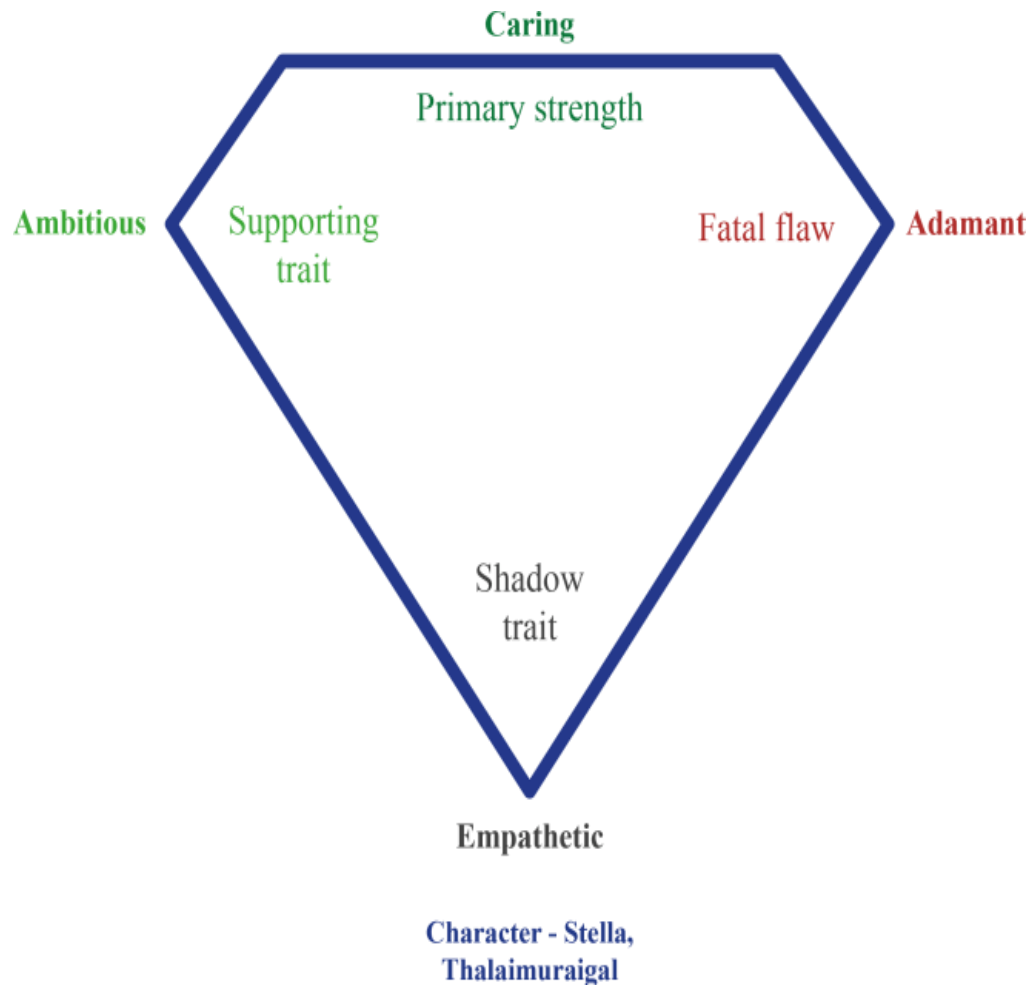


Fig. 4.42 Character Diamond of Stella

Stella's care and affection towards Sivaraman's family are her primary strength. Adapting to the village's situation, she aspires to build a hospital for the welfare of the people. She displays both characteristics of being headstrong, adamant and emotional.

Balu Mahendra's female protagonists are not one-dimensional; they exhibit different forms of strength, vulnerability and personal growth. Independent characters (Rekha, Sudha, Gowri, Stella) showcase courage and ambition. Emotionally vulnerable women (Indumathi, Radha, Padma, Rosie, Manoranjini) rely on love and relationships for support.

Characters who evolve (Viji, Thulasi in Marupadiyum, Thulasi in Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam) transform through life experiences.

This diversity highlights Balu Mahendra's nuanced portrayal of women, making them relatable and realistic rather than stereotypical. Each protagonist's story arc is shaped by their strengths and flaws, reflecting the complex realities of womanhood in Indian cinema.

4.3.6 Representation Of Other Female Characters in Balu Mahendra Films

Apart from the main women protagonists, the women characters featured in Balu Mahendra films are also analyzed. These characters appear in the movie as a supporting artist, a character artist or a background artist in the ambience with or without dialogues. Some play a significant role in the story arc while the other characters do not have any influence on the protagonist or the story. The following list shows the other women characters' looks and outfits present in the sixteen films.

4.3.6.1 Azhiyatha Kolangal

- **Actor Kamal Women Assistant** - She has a dusky complexion and attires herself in traditional dress, notably the saree, with a ponytail hairstyle. Her makeup is subtle and she prefers minimal adornments such as rings, earrings, chains and bangles
- **Pattabi's aunty** - Pattabi's aunty has brown skin and is dressed in a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal, with just a bindi and she wears simple ornaments like stud earrings and a chain
- **Pattabi's mother** - Pattabi's Mom has brown skin and is dressed in a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal, with just a bindi and she wears simple ornaments like stud earrings and a chain
- **Pattabi's cousin** - Pattabi's cousin has fair skin and is dressed in a skirt and top with a braided hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal and she wears simple ornaments such as a chain, stud earrings and bangles
- **Postman Grandmother** - The postman's grandmother has brown skin, dressed in a saree with a bun hairstyle. She wears minimal ornaments, including an earring and a chain, with no makeup

- **Old Lady** - The old lady in the road has brown skin, dressed in a saree with a bun hairstyle. Their makeup is minimal, with just a bindi and they wear simple ornaments like stud earrings and a chain
- **Sex Worker Character**- The Sex Worker character has brown skin, dressed in a saree with a bun hairstyle & flowers. Her makeup includes bright lipstick, kajal and bindi with simple ornaments like stud earrings, chains and nose pins
- **Dancer** - The dancer is seen with brown skin, dressed in dance attire with a braid hairstyle with flowers. She wears heavy makeup, which includes bindi, lipstick and kajal and heavy ornaments like a hip chain, bangles, anklets, chains and earrings
- **Girl in front of the Character Pattabi** - The girl in front of Pattabi has brown skin, wearing a skirt and top with a simple braided hairstyle with flowers. Her makeup is minimal, with just a bindi and wears minimal ornaments like a chain and stud earrings
- **Girls in the classroom** - The girls in the classroom have brown skin and wear a skirt and top with simple braided hairstyles with and without flowers. Their makeup is minimal, with just a bindi and few wear sacred ash on their forehead and minimal ornaments like a chain and stud earrings
- **Girls walking on the road** - The girls walking on the road have brown skin, dressed in half sarees with braided hairstyles. Their makeup is minimal, with a bindi and kajal and they wear simple ornaments like bangles, stud earrings and chains
- **Women sitting near the lake** - The women near the lake have brown skin and wear an in-skirt with a towel while bathing. They are not seen with any specific makeup and hairstyle as they are taking baths
- **Women Villagers watching the dance** - The villagers watching the dance have brown skin and are dressed in attire such as sarees, skirts and tops or half sarees. Their hairstyles are braid or bun hairstyle. They use minimal makeup, featuring just a bindi and wear simple ornaments like earrings and chains
- **Woman with the postman** - The woman with the postman has brown skin and wears a saree with a braid hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal, including a bindi and kajal and she wears simple ornaments like bangles, stud earrings and a chain

In Azhiyaatha Kolangal, women are predominantly portrayed with brown or dusky skin tones, reflecting a realistic and regionally rooted aesthetic. Traditional attire such as sarees, half-sarees and skirts with tops is common across characters, often accompanied by modest hairstyles like buns and braids, occasionally adorned with flowers. The makeup is generally minimal limited to bindi and occasionally kajal or sacred ash—except for characters like dancers or sex workers who are shown with more elaborate makeup and ornamentation to emphasize their roles.

Jewelry is modest and functional, including items like chains, stud earrings and bangles, reinforcing a grounded, everyday realism in women's representation. This portrayal highlights a community-based setting where visual identity is shaped by cultural norms, status and role-specific functions, offering a subtle commentary on femininity and class within the narrative.

4.3.6.2 Moodu Pani

- **Chandru's mother:** Chandru's mother has fair skin and wears a saree with a braid or bun hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal, with a bindi and she wears simple ornaments like a chain, stud earrings and nose pin
- **Rekha's mother:** Rekha's mother has brown skin and wears a saree with her braid hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal, with kajal and she wears a chain and stud earrings
- **Rekha's friend:** Rekha's friend has brown skin and wears a saree and is also seen in a skirt and top with a braid or ponytail hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal, including lipstick, kajal and a bindi and she wears a chain, loop earrings and bangles
- **Women Model:** The women model has brown fair skin and wears a modern frock with free hair. Her makeup is minimal, with a bindi, lipstick and lip gloss and she wears a chain, stud earrings and bangles
- **Worried mother:** The mother character has brown skin and wears a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal, with a bindi and she wears bangles, a chain and stud earrings

- **Sex Worker girl in car:** The girl in the car has brown skin and wears a saree with free hair. Her makeup is minimal, with lipstick and kajal and she wears minimal ornaments like chains and earrings
- **Childhood girl of Sex Worker women character:** The childhood girl of the Sex Worker women character has fair skin with a bun kind of hairstyle and heavy makeup with lipstick, lipgloss, kajal and a big bindi. She wears grand attire chains and earrings
- **Flashback character of Sex Worker women:** In the flashback scene, the Sex Worker women character shown has fair skin, wearing a saree with a braided hairstyle and flowers. Her makeup is heavy, with lipstick, big bindi, kajal and eyeliner. She wears heavy chains, earrings and bangles
- **Other Sex Worker girl's characters:** The girls have fair skin and wear modern tops and jeans with ponytail hairstyle. Their makeup is minimal, with kajal and lipstick and they wear stud earrings, a watch and bangles
- **Sex Worker dealer:** The Sex Worker dealer has brown skin and wears a saree with a bun hairstyle with flowers. Her makeup is heavy, with lipstick, a big bindi and kajal. She wears heavy chains, earrings, a nose pin and bangles
- **Girl in Chandru's hotel:** The girl in Chandru's hotel room scene has brown skin and wears a saree with free hair. Her makeup is minimal, with lipstick and kajal and she wears a watch and stud earrings
- **Receptionist girl in the hotel:** The receptionist girl has fair skin and wears a saree with a braid hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal and she wears simple ornaments like a stud earring, chain and watch
- **Woman in the Sex Worker room:** The Sex Worker woman shown in the different room has brown skin and wears a saree with a bun hairstyle and flowers. Their makeup is heavy, with lipstick, a big bindi and kajal and wear heavy chains, earrings, a nose pin and bangles
- **Woman on the road with Chandru:** The woman met on the road with Chandru has brown skin and wears a saree with a braided hairstyle and flowers. Her makeup is minimal, featuring a bindi and ornaments like chains and bangles

- **Women Singers in the Pub:** The women singers in the pub have fair skin and wear modern sarees or frocks with free hairstyles. Their makeup is heavy, with kajal, lipstick and a bindi. They wear hip chains, heavy neck chains and stud earrings
- **Woman in the house:** The woman in the house has brown skin and wears a saree with a braided hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal, featuring lipstick and she wears stud earrings and a chain
- **Woman talking to Rekha's friend:** The woman talking to Rekha's friend has brown skin and wears a saree with a braided hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal, including lipstick and kajal and she wears a chain and earrings
- **Women used as fillers in scenes:** The women used as fillers in many scenes are predominantly with brown skin tones and wear modern frocks with free hairstyles. Their makeup is minimal, with lipstick and a bindi and they wear simple ornaments like stud earrings and chains

In Moodu Pani, female characters are represented with diverse appearances, spanning fair to brown skin tones. Most women are shown in traditional sarees, though a few, like models and sex workers, appear in modern outfits such as frocks or jeans. Hairstyles range from braids and buns to free and ponytail styles, often adorned with flowers in traditional settings. Makeup is generally minimal, with occasional use of kajal, lipstick and bindi, though sex workers and performers are portrayed with heavier makeup. Jewelry is simple for most characters - chains, stud earrings, bangles and nose pins—while those in roles like dancers or sex workers wear more ornate accessories such as hip chains and heavy neckpieces. This portrayal reflects a visual hierarchy, where appearance aligns with class, role or narrative significance within the film.

4.3.6.3 Moondram Pirai

- **Silk Smitha:** The Silk Smitha character has brown skin and wears modern outfits like shorts, t-shirts, night dresses, pants, frocks and dance costumes. Her hair is styled in a ponytail or freehair, with minimal makeup like kajal, lipstick and lipgloss. She wears accessories like bangles, rings, coolers and a headband

- **Sridevi's mother:** Sridevi's mother has fair skin and wears a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her makeup includes a big bindi and she wears minimal accessories like stud earrings, nose pins and chains
- **Little girl:** The little girl has brown skin and wears a modern frock with a braid hairstyle. She wears minimal makeup and studs
- **Old Lady:** The old lady woman has brown skin and wears a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her makeup includes minimal bindi and she wears specs, stud earrings and a nose pin
- **Police Women:** The policewomen have brown skin and wear sarees with braided or bun hairstyles. Their makeup includes a big bindi and they wear minimal accessories like stud earrings, rings and bangles
- **Nurse in Hospital:** The women nurses shown in the hospital have fair and brown skin and wear uniforms with bun hairstyles. Their makeup is minimal and they also wear watches and stud earrings
- **Main Sex Worker Women character:** The Sex Worker woman has brown skin and wears a saree with a bun hairstyle with flowers. Her makeup is heavy, with lipstick, a big bindi and kajal and wears heavy chains, earrings, nose pins and bangles
- **Other Sex Worker girls:** The other Sex Worker girl's characters shown in different scenes have brown skin and wear sarees or modern outfits with free hairstyles. Their makeup is minimal, featuring lipstick and kajal, with chains and earrings
- **Dancing girls:** The girls dancing in a specific scene have brown or fair skin and wear modern jeans and tops. Some have ponytails, others have free hairstyles and their makeup includes minimal lipstick and kajal. They wear coolers, stud earrings, watches and caps
- **Girl in Beach Scene:** The girl in the beach scene has fair skin and wears a modern bikini with a bun hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal and wears earrings, a chain and bangles
- **Girls in Campfire:** The girls present in campfire scenes wear modern skirts, tops and jeans with free hair or ponytail hairstyles. Their makeup is minimal and they wear watches and caps

- **Girls in picnic spot:** The girls at the picnic spots have fair and brown skin and wear modern skirts, tops and frocks. They have free hair or ponytail hairstyles and their makeup is minimal with ornaments like coolers, watches, stud earrings and caps
- **Girls in a car:** The scene where the girls in the car have fair and brown skin, wearing modern skirts, tops and frocks with free hairstyles. Their makeup includes minimal eyeliner and lipstick and they wear stud earrings and chains
- **Lady in the train:** The lady shown in the train scene has brown skin and wears a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her makeup includes a bindi and she wears nose pins and studs
- **Helper Woman:** The helper woman has brown skin and wears a saree and sweater with a braid hairstyle. She wears minimal makeup and a bindi and is seen with no accessories
- **Kerala Woman helper:** The Woman helper belongs to Kerala and speaks Malayalam has fair skin and wears a saree with a braid hairstyle. Her makeup includes minimal bindi and kajal with a chain, bangles and stud earrings
- **Women watching the monkey:** The scene where the women watching the monkey act have brown skin and wear skirts, sarees and half sarees with braided or bun hairstyles. Their makeup is minimal, featuring bindi and kajal and they wear stud earrings, chains and flowers
- **Woman on the road:** The scenes where the woman shown on the road has brown skin and wears a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her makeup includes a bindi and she wears stud earrings
- **Woman on the train:** The woman shown on the train has brown skin and wears a saree with her hair in a ponytail style. She wears minimal makeup and less ornaments

In Moondram Pirai, female characters are portrayed across a wide social and cultural spectrum, with diverse skin tones ranging from fair to brown. Traditional roles such as mothers, helpers and older women predominantly wear sarees with bun or braid hairstyles, minimal makeup like bindi and kajal and simple jewelry such as chains, stud earrings and nose pins.

In contrast, characters like Silk Smitha and various sex workers are dressed in modern outfits including shorts, frocks and dance costumes, featuring free or styled hair and more visible makeup with accessories like bangles, rings and coolers. Younger girls and those in leisure scenes like the beach, campfire or picnic are dressed in modern attire such as skirts, tops or jeans, with minimal makeup and accessories like caps, watches and sunglasses.

The film visually contrasts traditional and modern femininity, using costume, makeup and adornment to reflect each woman's background, role and setting within the narrative.

4.3.6.4 Neengal Kettavai

- **Silk Smitha:** Silk Smitha has brown skin and during her dance scenes wears various outfits including pants and top, skirt and crop top, mini frock with a belt and saree. She styles her hair in free hair and bun style. Her makeup includes lipstick, kajal and heavy accessories like bangles, chains, earrings and anklets
- **School principal:** The school principal has brown skin and wears a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her makeup includes a bindi, with chains and stud earrings
- **Teachers:** The teachers have brown skin and wear sarees with a bun hairstyle. Their makeup includes bindi, with chains and stud earrings
- **Singers:** The women singers have fair skin and wear sleeveless sarees with a free hairstyle. Their makeup includes bindi, kajal and lipstick, with chains and stud earrings
- **Antagonist's daughter:** The antagonist's daughter has fair skin and wears a modern frock with free hair. Her makeup includes lip balm and eyeliner and she wears chains and loops
- **Woman Model:** The woman model has fair skin and wears a bikini with a bun hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal, with stud earrings and rings
- **Mother Character:** The mother character in the movie has brown skin and wears a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her makeup includes bindi and kajal, with stud earrings
- **Old Woman:** The old woman (Grandmother) has brown skin and wears a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her makeup includes bindi and she wears accessories such as stud earrings and bangles

- **Mother of the kid:** The mom of the kid has fair skin and wears a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her makeup includes bindi and kajal, with stud earrings, chains and bangles
- **Nurse:** The nurse character has brown skin and wears a uniform. No additional makeup or accessories are seen
- **Workers in hill stations:** The women who work in hill stations have brown skin and wear sarees with bun or braid hairstyle. Their makeup includes bindi and minimal accessories such as chains, jhumkis and nose pins
- **Background dancers:** The women background dancers have brown skin and wear pants and tops, with hairstyles ranging from braids to free hair. Their makeup includes minimal lipstick and their accessories include loops
- **Chinese foreigner:** The Chinese foreign women are shown with fair skin and wear formal attire of their country with free hair. Her makeup includes lip gloss, stud earrings and a watch
- **Group of girls:** The group of girls in many scenes are with brown skin in sarees and frocks. Their hairstyles are a mix of braids and free hair and their makeup is minimal
- **Girls dancing on stage:** The girls dancing on stage have brown skin and wear skirts and tops with braided hairstyles. Their makeup is minimal
- **Women Audience watching the show:** The women audience watching the singing show have brown skin wearing various outfits such as woolen tops, tops and jeans or frocks. Their hairstyles range from braids, ponytails and free hair. Their makeup and ornaments are minimal which include bindi, kajal, lip gloss and accessories like loops, chains and earrings
- **Foreigner photographer:** The women foreigner photographer has fair skin and wears a frock with a bun hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal, with a watch and bracelet
- **A kid near the river:** The female kid present in the scene near the river has brown skin and wears a skirt and top with a free hairstyle. No additional makeup or accessories are visible

- **A waitress from Kerala:** The waitress shown as from Kerala has fair skin and wears a blouse and skirt with a bun hairstyle. No additional makeup or accessories are visible
- **Other women in the hospital:** The other women in the hospital have brown skin and wear sarees with braid hairstyles. Their makeup is minimal
- **Random women on the street:** The random women on the street have brown skin and wear sarees with either bun or braid hairstyles. Their makeup is minimal
- **Filler girls:** The girls present in various scenes as fillers have fair skin and wear kurtis with free hair. Their makeup includes minimal lipstick, with stud earrings
- **Villagers at panchayat:** The women village panchayat members have brown skin and wear a saree with a bun hairstyle. Their makeup is minimal and use ornaments like chains
- **Women bathing:** The scene where women shown bathing have brown skin and wear skirts and towels with bun hairstyles. Their makeup includes lip gloss, with stud earrings

In Neengal Kettavai, the representation of women spans a wide range of roles, appearances and class backgrounds, visually distinguished through costumes, makeup and accessories. Women with brown skin predominantly appear in traditional roles such as mothers, teachers, nurses, workers and villagers, often wearing sarees with bun or braid hairstyles, minimal makeup like bindi and kajal and simple jewelry such as stud earrings and chains. In contrast, characters like Silk Smitha, dancers, singers and foreign women are styled in modern, glamorous or culturally specific outfits such as bikinis, skirts, frocks and formal wear paired with free or styled hair, heavier makeup and more striking accessories like loops, bangles, anklets and headbands.

Young girls and filler characters are shown with modest outfits and minimal adornment, reflecting innocence or background presence. Across the film, women's appearances reflect their narrative roles, ranging from rural to urban, reinforcing both cultural settings and character types.

4.3.6.5 Un Kannil Neer Vazhindhal

- **Mounika:** Mounika is brown skin toned and dressed in sarees with either braided or free hairstyles. Her makeup is minimal, including a bindi and kajal and she wears accessories like chains, stud earrings and bangles
- **Mounika's mother:** Mounika's mother, with brown skin, is seen in a saree with a bun hairstyle and minimal makeup including a bindi and she wears bangles
- **Madhavi's friend:** Madhavi's friend has brown skin and is seen wearing a half saree with a braid hairstyle and minimal makeup including a bindi. She used accessories such as stud earrings, a chain and a nose pin. In other scenes, she wears frocks with a free hairstyle, minimal lipstick and the same nose pin and studs
- **Old Woman:** The old woman character is shown with brown skin in a saree with a bun hairstyle, minimal makeup including a bindi and no visible accessories
- **Old Woman in the Carnival:** The old woman in the Carnival has brown skin, wears a saree with a bun hairstyle, minimal makeup including a bindi and wears accessories such as stud earrings and a chain
- **Police:** The women police skin-toned are in uniform with a bun hairstyle, minimal makeup including a bindi and kajal and wear stud earrings
- **Sex worker Head:** The woman shown as the illegal sex workerhead in the film has a brown skintone seen in a saree with a braid hairstyle, heavy makeup including a bindi, kajal and lipstick and minimal accessories like a chain and stud earrings
- **Women shown as sex workers:** The women shown as sex workers in the film have both fair and brown skin and wear frocks, tops and skirts with ponytails, free hair or braids. Their makeup is minimal, including a bindi and kajal and they wear chains, bangles and earrings
- **Sex workers in jail:** The sex workers in jail have fair skin and wear frocks, tops and skirts with braided hairstyles. Their makeup is heavy, including kajal, lipstick and eyeliner and they wear minimal accessories like studs and chains
- **Rajasthani girl:** The girl projected as Rajasthani is skintoned and is dressed in a saree with a braid hairstyle and minimal makeup including a bindi and lipstick. She used accessories such as chains, stud earrings and bangles

- **Wife of businessman:** The wife of the businessman is shown as brown skin-toned, wears a saree with free hairstyle, uses minimal makeup including a bindi and lipstick and uses ornaments such as chain, earrings (jhumkas) and bangles
- **Rape victim:** The woman projected as a rape victim in the films is shown as fair skintone with a saree and braid hairstyle, but no makeup or accessories are noted
- **YG Mahendran dressed as a woman:** YG Mahendran, a male dressed as a female character shown with fair skin, is dressed as a woman in a half saree with a braid hairstyle, used minimal makeup including a bindi and kajal. The character uses accessories such as chains, bangles and earrings
- **Dancer:** The women dancer, with fair skin, is seen wearing a bikini, styled with a ponytail hairstyle and minimal makeup, including lipstick. She does not wear any accessories. In another scene, she wears a miniskirt in a free hairstyle and heavy makeup, including lipstick and kajal, using accessories such as headpiece, armlet (vanki) and hip chain. In a different scene, she wears a madisaree (attire of a specific caste), with a braided hairstyle, minimal makeup (lipstick and kajal) and accessories with earrings (jhumkas), chain and bangles
- **Dancer girls:** The dancer girls, with brown skin, wear miniskirts and have a bun hairstyle. Their makeup is minimal, featuring lipstick and no accessories
- **Foreigner in the carnival:** The foreigner, with fair skin, is dressed in a frocks or a top and skirt. She has a free hairstyle, with no visible makeup or accessories
- **Girl in the sofa:** The girl in a specific scene sitting on the sofa has fair skin and wears a top and skirt, styled with a braided hairstyle. She has minimal makeup, including a bindi, kajal and lipstick and used accessories such as bangles and anklets
- **Girl in the car:** The girl in the car has fair skin with a top and skirt and free hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal and she wears a stud earrings and chain
- **Girls shown as Sex Workers in Veniraadai Moorthy's place:** The girls, with fair skin, are seen in frocks or tops and skirts with ponytails or braided hairstyles. Their makeup is minimal, including a bindi and kajal and use accessories such as chains, bangles and earrings
- **Girls on steps:** The girls seen on elevation are with both fair and brown skin and wear bikinis or skirts and tops with bun or free hairstyle. Their makeup is minimal,

including a bindi, kajal and lipstick and use accessories such as bangles, anklets, stud earrings and chains

- **Girl Spy:** The girl, with fair skin, wears a frock with a ponytail hairstyle and has minimal makeup, including a bindi and lip gloss. She used accessories such as chains and stud earrings
- **Woman complaining in the police station:** The woman shown as giving a complaint in the police station has fair skin, wears a saree with a bun hairstyle and uses minimal makeup including a bindi and kajal. She wears minimal accessories such as stud earrings and a chain
- **Women eating in the carnival:** The women eating in the carnival are brown-skinned dressed in sarees with braid hairstyle and use minimal makeup including a bindi. They have used ornaments such as stud earrings, watches and chains. Other women in the carnival have both fair and brown skin and wear frocks, tops and skirts with free hair or braid hairstyles
- **Women in the police station:** The women who are shown in the police station scene have fair skin, wear sarees with a free hairstyle, minimal makeup including a bindi and lipstick and use ornaments such as chains and stud earrings
- **Other girls seen in the balcony:** The girls visible in the balcony scene have fair skin and wear frocks, tops and skirts with ponytails, free hair and braids hairstyle. Their makeup is minimal, including a bindi and kajal and wear accessories such as chains, bangles and earrings
- **Random girl in the park:** The random girl in the park is brown skin toned seen in a bikini with a free hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal, including kajal. She wears accessories such as stud earrings, chains and a watch

In *Un Kannil Neer Vazhindhal*, the portrayal of women reflects a diverse spectrum of social roles and appearances, distinguished through their clothing, grooming and accessories. Most characters, especially those in traditional or familial roles like Mounika, her mother and various women in sarees, are brown-skinned and styled modestly with braid or bun hairstyles, minimal makeup (such as bindi and kajal) and simple jewelry like chains, bangles and studs.

Women depicted in roles related to dance, sex work or urban life such as dancers, sex workers or women in the carnival span both fair and brown skin tones and are dressed in modern attire like frocks, skirts, bikinis or miniskirts. Their makeup varies from minimal to heavy depending on the context, with added accessories like anklets, hip chains, jhumkas and decorative elements.

Notably, fair-skinned women often appear in more glamorous or stylized settings, including in cars, balconies or as foreigners. Unique characters like the male comedian cross-dressed as a woman or the rape victim are marked by visual choices that heighten contrast through traditional attire or the absence of makeup. Across the film, appearance, dress and styling are closely tied to character function and social status, offering a layered visual commentary on femininity, class and role-based identity.

4.3.6.6 Rettai Vaal Kuruvi

- **Sridevi:** Sridevi has fair skin and wears a shirt and skirt with a braid. Her makeup includes a bindi, lipstick and kajal with a nose pin, loop earrings, bangles and a chain
- **Nurse:** Nurses have both fair and brown skin and wear uniforms with bun hairstyles. Their makeup is minimal, featuring a bindi and some wear watches
- **House Owner's wife:** The owner's wife has brown skin, dressed in a saree with her hair in a bun hairstyle adorned with flowers. Her makeup is minimal with a bindi, earrings, bangles, a nose pin and a chain
- **Old Woman:** Old aged woman has brown skin, wearing a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her makeup includes a bindi, stud earrings and a chain
- **Female Kids:** The female kids have both fair and brown skin, dressed in modern frocks with braided hairstyles. They wear minimal makeup including a bindi and earrings
- **Lady in bus:** The lady in the bus has brown skin and wears a saree with a braid hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal, including a bindi, with earrings and bangles
- **Women Audience in the show:** The women audience in the show have brown skin and wear salwars or sarees. Some have braided hairstyles, others wear ponytails

and all are presented with minimal makeup including bindi. They used minimal jewelry like earrings, bangles or chains

- **Women in the interview:** The women being interviewed have brown skin and wear sarees with bun hairstyles. Their makeup is minimal, featuring a bindi and they wear accessories such as nose pins, earrings and chains
- **Women in Prenatal Ceremony (Valaikattu in Tamil):** The women attending the prenatal ceremony of other women have brown skin tones and wear a saree with a braid hairstyle adorned with flowers. They are with minimal makeup with a bindi, stud earrings, chains and bangles
- **Women in the shop:** The women in the shop have brown skin, dressed in jeans and a top with a free hairstyle or a salwar with a braid hairstyle. They wear no makeup or accessories
- **Woman in temple:** The random woman in the temple has brown skin and wears a saree with a braid hairstyle adorned with flowers. Her makeup is minimal with a bindi, stud earrings, chains and bangles
- **Women in the wedding:** The women in the wedding have brown skin, dressed in a saree with a braid hairstyle and flowers. Their makeup includes a bindi, stud earrings, chains and bangles
- **Women in shooting spot:** The women at the shooting spot scene are of both brown and fair skin tones, wearing skirts, tops or frocks, as well as salwars and sarees. Their hairstyles range from braids, buns, ponytails and free hairstyles. Makeup is minimal, including bindi, along with stud earrings, chains, bangles and sometimes no accessories
- **Woman walking in the corridor:** The woman walking in the corridor has brown skin, dressed in a saree with a braid hairstyle. She wears no makeup or accessories

In Rettai Vaal Kuruvi, the depiction of women spans a variety of everyday roles and social settings, characterized by predominantly brown skin tones with occasional fair-skinned characters like Sridevi. Traditional attire such as sarees dominates, especially among older women, housewives and those shown in domestic, religious or ceremonial contexts (e.g., temple, wedding, prenatal ceremony). These women typically have braided or bun hairstyles, often adorned with flowers and wear minimal makeup consisting of bindi, kajal

and lipstick, along with modest jewelry like earrings, bangles, chains and sometimes nose pins.

Professional women like nurses and interviewees are portrayed in uniforms or sarees with neat hairstyles and restrained styling. Meanwhile, female kids and women in modern spaces (shops, shooting spots) are dressed in frocks, jeans or salwars, with minimal or no makeup and simple hairstyles like ponytails or free hair. The styling throughout is largely subtle, anchoring the film's realistic tone while symbolizing class, age and cultural context through dress and grooming.

4.3.6.7 Veedu

- **Mangamma:** Mangamma has brown skin and wears a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal, featuring bindi and kajal and she used accessories such as chains, studs, bangles and a nose pin
- **Friend:** The woman friend helping the protagonist has brown skin and is dressed in a saree with a braid hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal with bindi and kajal and she wears a chain
- **House owner:** The house owner woman has brown skin and wears a madi saree (specific saree attire worn by a particular caste category) with a bun hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal, including bindi and kajal, with accessories such as bangles, studs and a chain
- **Rich woman:** The rich woman has brown skin and is dressed in modern pants and a top with free hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal, including lipstick and kajal and uses accessories such as bangles, a chain and studs
- **Small child:** The small female child has fair skin and wears a modern frock with a bob-cut hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal, including kajal and bindi, with stud earrings
- **Indu:** Indu has brown skin and is seen in various outfits, including half sarees and modern skirts and tops. Her hairstyles range from braids to ponytails. Her makeup varies from minimal to moderate including bindi, kajal and vermilion. She used accessories such as bangles, studs and chains

- **Sudha's friends:** Sudha's friends have brown skin and are dressed in sarees with braid hairstyles. Their makeup is minimal with bindi and kajal and they use accessories such as studs, chains and bangles
- **Office colleagues:** The office colleagues have brown skin and are dressed in sarees with braid hairstyles. Their makeup is minimal with bindi and kajal and they use accessories such as bangles, studs, chains and sometimes a watch
- **Other women in the bus:** The other women in the bus have brown skin and are dressed in sarees with braid hairstyles. Their makeup is minimal with bindi and kajal and they use accessories such as chains and studs
- **Other women at the function& on the building construction site:** The other women at the function have brown skin and wear sarees with braid hairstyles. Their makeup is minimal with bindi and kajal and they use accessories such as chains and studs
- **Women in the restaurant:** The women in the restaurant have brown skin and are dressed in sarees with braid hairstyles. Their makeup is minimal with bindi and kajal and they wear bangles and studs
- **Women on the road as fillers:** The women on the road used as fillers have brown skin and are dressed in sarees or a combination of sarees, skirts and tops with braid hairstyles. Their makeup is minimal with bindi and kajal and they use accessories such as bangles and studs
- **Visitors on the site:** The women visitors on the site have fair skin and wear sarees with braid hairstyle. Their makeup is minimal, featuring bindi and lipstick and they wear accessories such as chains, studs, bangles and sunglasses
- **Woman in the lift:** The woman in the lift has brown skin and is dressed in a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal, including bindi and kajal and she uses chains and studs
- **Woman in the house:** The woman in the house has brown skin and wears a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal, including bindi and kajal and she uses chains and studs

In Veedu, the portrayal of women emphasizes realism and traditional aesthetics, with a strong presence of brown-skinned characters across various social roles. Most women are

seen in sarees, particularly styled with braid or bun hairstyles, reflecting both everyday life and cultural norms. Their makeup is generally minimal, typically including a bindi and kajal, with occasional use of lipstick or vermilion.

Accessories are modest and consistent - chains, studs, bangles and occasionally nose pins or watches. Even characters from slightly different social contexts, like rich women or office workers, maintain a grounded appearance, with only subtle variations such as modern outfits or freer hairstyles. Younger characters like Indu and the small child are portrayed with contemporary touches (skirts, frocks, ponytails, bob cuts), yet still retain minimal and simple adornment. Across scenes ranging from homes and buses to restaurants, offices and construction sites, the film consistently presents women in a restrained, realistic fashion that aligns with its socio-cultural setting.

4.3.6.8 Sandhya Raagam

The film was released in black and white, hence the skin tone of the characters can not be identified.

- **House Owner:** The House owner woman wears a saree with a bun hairstyle. Used bindi and accessories such as bangles, earrings and chains
- **Doctor:** Doctor Woman presents in a uniform with a bun hairstyle. Accessories vary from minimal to none, including bangles and earrings
- **Nurse:** The nurse presented in uniform with a bun hairstyle and no accessories
- **Old Lady:** The other old lady is attired with a saree with a bun hairstyle along with bindi, bangles, earrings and occasionally a nose pin
- **Small Kid:** A small kid comes with modern or uniform attire, including frocks and pinafores. Hairstyles include ponytails and free hair. Used bindi with bangles and earrings
- **School Teacher:** She used a saree with a bun hairstyle and a bindi with earrings
- **Village Children Playing:** half saree with a braid hairstyle and bindi with bangles, earrings and a black chain
- **Village Old Lady:** saree with a bun hairstyle. No accessories
- **Village Kid:** skirt and top with a braid hairstyle. No accessories

- **Neighbour Girl:** She wears a half saree with a braid hairstyle. Uses bindi and accessories such as bangles, earrings and a black chain
- **Neighbour:** Neighbour woman wearing a saree with a bun hairstyle. Uses bindi and kajal and accessories like bangles and earrings
- **Neighbour Patient:** She is presented with a saree with a bun hairstyle without any accessories
- **Neighbors in City House:** Neighbours in the city house presented with a saree with a bun hairstyle and small earrings
- **Old Lady in Orphanage:** Old lady attired with saree with either a bun or braid hairstyle along with bindi and earrings
- **Orphanage Receptionist and Employees:** Orphanage women employees come up with the saree with a bun or braid hairstyle along with bindi, earrings, nose pins, chains and bangles
- **Woman at Hospital:** saree with a bun hairstyle. No accessories
- **Women in Village:** saree with a bun hairstyle. No accessories
- **Women in Village Washing Clothes:** The woman has the profession of washing clothes comes with a skirt with a bun hairstyle and no accessories
- **Women in Village Farming:** saree with a bun hairstyle. No accessories
- **Women in City Walking (fillers):** Women as fillers come up with the attire including sarees and salwars with various hairstyles like buns and braids with flowers. No accessories

In Sandhya Raagam, the depiction of women is grounded in simplicity and authenticity, reflective of both urban and rural life and constrained by the black-and-white format which renders skin tone indeterminate. The majority of female characters are dressed in sarees, with bun or braid hairstyles being the most common, often adorned with flowers in certain scenes. Makeup is minimal, typically limited to a bindi and occasionally kajal. Accessories are modest and context-specific ranging from bangles, earrings, chains and nose pins for some characters (especially in domestic or institutional roles like house owners orphanage workers and neighbors) to completely absent for others (such as villagers, patients and laboring women). Younger girls and children are dressed in frocks, pinafores or half sarees, with simple hairstyles like ponytails or braids and minimal adornments like black

chains, bangles and earrings. Overall, the film presents women in realistic, function-driven attire with minimal makeup, reflecting the socially grounded tone of the narrative.

4.3.6.9 Vanna Vanna Pookkal

- **Doctor:** The doctor has dark skin and wears a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her minimal makeup includes a bindi with earrings, bangles, a chain and a nose pin
- **Maid:** The maid has dark skin and wears a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her accessories vary from none to minimal additions like kajal, bindi, bangles, chains and earrings
- **Mano's mother:** Mano's mother has fair skin and is dressed in a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her makeup is minimal, featuring a bindi and she wears earrings and occasionally a bangle
- **Mano's sister:** Mano's sister has dark skin and is dressed in a skirt and top with a ponytail hairstyle. Her minimal makeup includes a bindi with a chain, earrings and a bangle
- **Old Lady in the village:** The Old Lady in the village has dark skin and wears a saree with a bun hairstyle. She used minimal makeup and accessories such as earrings and a chain
- **Nurse:** The nurse has fair skin and wears a nurse skirt uniform with a bun hairstyle. Her minimal makeup includes bindi and she does not wear any accessories
- **Shenbagam's mother:** Shenbagam's mother has dark skin and is dressed in a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her minimal makeup includes kajal and bindi and used accessories such as nose pin, chain, earrings and a bangle
- **Siva's grandmother:** Siva's grandmother has fair skin and wears a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her minimal makeup includes sacred ash on her forehead and she used accessories such as earrings, a nose pin, a chain and a bangle
- **Dancers in song:** The dancers in the song are both dark and fair-skinned skin dressed in sarees with bun hairstyles. Their minimal makeup includes bindi, along with earrings, bangles, chains and flowers
- **Women walking (fillers):** The women walking as fillers have dark skin and are dressed in half sarees with bun hairstyles. They do not have any accessories or visible makeup

- **Women in the temple:** The women in the temple have dark skin and wear half sarees with braid hairstyle. Their minimal makeup includes bindi and used accessories such as earrings, chains, bangles and flowers
- **Women in bus:** The women in the bus have dark skin and are dressed in sarees with bun hairstyles. They do not have any accessories or visible makeup

In Vanna Vanna Pookkal, the portrayal of women reflects a grounded, rural setting with a strong emphasis on traditional attire and minimal adornment. Most women, regardless of skin tone, are shown in sarees or half sarees with predominantly bun or braid hairstyles, often adorned with flowers in specific contexts like temple scenes or songs. Makeup is modest, typically limited to bindi and occasionally kajal or sacred ash on the forehead. Accessories are used sparingly; common items include earrings, chains, bangles and occasionally nose pins, with some women, especially fillers or those on public transport, wearing none. Younger characters and domestic roles like Mano's sister or the maid maintain this minimal aesthetic while still incorporating simple jewelry like a single chain or bangle. Overall, the film presents women in a naturalistic, culturally resonant manner, reinforcing traditional norms of dress and grooming with a restrained and realistic visual style.

4.3.6.10 Marupadiyum

- **Hostel friends:** The women's hostel friends are with fair skin dressed in skirts and tops or salwars. Their hairstyles vary from free hair to ponytails and they use accessories such as earrings and chains, with bindi
- **Hostel girls:** The other hostel girls used as fillers are fair and dark-skinned and wear a mix of churidars, skirts and tops or shirts and jeans. Their hairstyles range from braids to ponytails and free hair, with no accessories or makeup
- **Hostel Warden:** The hostel warden has fair skin and is dressed in a saree with a braid hairstyle. Her minimal makeup includes bindi, used earrings and a watch
- **Kid in a restaurant:** The kid in the restaurant has fair skin and wears a modern frock with a ponytail hairstyle. No accessories or makeup are visible for this character

- **Kavitha's mother:** Kavitha's mother presented with dark skin, dressed in a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her minimal accessories include bangles, chains and earrings
- **Neighbor:** The neighbor lady used as fillers has dark skin and is dressed in a saree with a braid hairstyle. No accessories or makeup are visible
- **Old Lady:** Old lady presented with fair skin, is dressed in a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her minimal makeup includes sacred ash on her forehead, along with bangles and a chain
- **Receptionist:** The receptionist woman presented with fair skin and wore a churidar with free hair or a braid hairstyle. Her minimal makeup includes bindi, used earrings and a watch
- **School headmistress:** The school headmistress has fair skin and is dressed in a saree with a braid hairstyle. Her minimal makeup includes bindi and she has used earrings, a watch and a chain
- **Servant:** The woman servant presented with dark skin and wears a saree with a bun hairstyle. Her makeup includes bindi, bangles and a chain
- **Servant's daughter:** The servant's daughter has dark skin and is dressed in a skirt and top with a braid hairstyle. Her makeup includes bindi and earrings
- **Thulasi's friend:** Thulasi's friend has fair skin and is dressed in a saree with either a braid or bun hairstyle. Her makeup includes bindi, earrings, bangles and chains
- **Thulasi's friend's daughter:** Thulasi's friend's daughter has fair skin and is dressed in a modern frock with a free hair hairstyle. No accessories or makeup are visible
- **Dancers in set:** The dancer women in the set have fair and dark skin, are dressed in sarees and are styled in bun hairstyles. Their makeup ranges from none to minimal along with bindi and heavy accessories including bangles, chains, earrings and anklets
- **Wedding audience:** The women used as the wedding audience presented with dark skin and wore sarees with bun hairstyles. No accessories or makeup are visible
- **Women at the party:** The women in the party vary in skin tone and outfit. She wears modern dresses or frocks with free hair or ponytail hairstyle, with minimal accessories and makeup. Some have bindi and others have earrings and chains
- **Restaurant crowd (Women):** The women's restaurant crowd used a filler with fair and dark skin, wearing a mix of modern outfits including salwars, skirts and tops or

sarees. Their hairstyles vary from braids to free hair, with no visible accessories or makeup

- **Women on the road (fillers):** The women on the road used as fillers in certain scenes have dark skin and are dressed in sarees with bun hairstyles. No accessories or makeup are visible

In Marupadiyum, the depiction of women spans a broad social and cultural spectrum, showcasing both traditional and modern aesthetics. Women are portrayed with varying skin tones - fair and dark and are dressed in diverse attires ranging from sarees and chudidhars to skirts, tops and jeans, depending on their role and setting.

Hairstyles include buns, braids, ponytails and free hair, with younger women and those in urban settings more often seen in modern outfits and looser hairstyles. Makeup is consistently minimal, typically limited to a bindi and in some cases, sacred ash for older characters.

Accessories such as earrings, chains, bangles and watches are selectively used, mostly among key characters, while filler roles like restaurant crowds, wedding audiences or road passers-by often appear without accessories or makeup. The film's visual portrayal of women emphasizes naturalism and variety, reflecting both urban modernity and cultural rootedness.

4.3.6.11 Sathi Leelavathi

- **Leela's Friend:** Leela's friend is dark-skinned, in a saree with a bun hairstyle. Accessories used include bindi, earrings and flowers
- **Leela's Daughter:** She is fair-skinned and wearing frocks, skirts and tops. Hairstyles include ponytails or braids, with accessories such as bindi, earrings and chains
- **Leela's Mom:** She is dark-skinned, in a saree with a bun hairstyle. Used accessories include bindi, earrings and nose pin

- **Neighbour Old lady:** Neighbour old lady is fair-skinned, in a saree with a bun hairstyle. The old lady used heavy accessories including bindi, chains, bangles, earrings and nose pin
- **Neighbors:** Neighbour women are mostly dark-skinned, in sarees with braids and hairstyles. Used earrings alone
- **Palaniammal's Relatives:** Relative women are dark-skinned, in sarees with bun hairstyles. They have used accessories such as bindi, bangles, chains and earrings
- **Priya's Roommate:** She is dark-skinned, in a saree or salwar with a bun or braid hairstyle. She has used accessories including bindi, sacred ash, earrings (jhumkas), bangles and chains
- **School Kids:** The kids are fair and dark-skinned, in uniforms with braid hairstyles. No accessories were used by them
- **Hairdresser:** A female hairdresser is dark-skinned, wearing a frock with a bun hairstyle. Used minimal accessories such as earrings
- **Employees:** Women employees are dark-skinned, wearing sarees and chudidhars with braids hairstyles. Accessories range from none to minimal, including bindi, chains, earrings, watches and flowers
- **Women in Restaurant:** The other women present in the restaurant scene were dark-skinned, in salwar with braid hairstyles. No accessories were used by her
- **Old lady in Restaurant:** She is fair-skinned, in a saree with a bun hairstyle. She used accessories such as bangles and earrings
- **Women in Airport/Plane:** Women presented in airport or plane scenes are fair and dark-skinned, wearing sarees or salwars. Hairstyles used include ponytails and free hair. No accessories are prominently used
- **Women in Swimming Pool:** Women shown in the swimming pool are fair-skinned, in swimsuits with ponytails and free hairstyles. No accessories were used by them
- **Women (fillers):** The scenes that show women on the road are fair and dark-skinned, as well as modern attire. Hairstyles include ponytails or free hair. No accessories were used by them
- **Girl (fillers):** She is dark-skinned, in salwar with a braid hairstyle. Used Bindi alone

In Sathi Leelavathi, the representation of women spans across age groups, social roles and settings, reflecting a diverse and realistic portrayal. Women are shown with both fair and dark skin tones, dressed in traditional sarees, salwars, frocks, skirts and modern attire depending on their role. Hairstyles vary from buns and braids to ponytails and free hair, with more traditional characters favoring buns and braids.

Accessories are minimal to moderate typically including bindis, earrings, chains, bangles and nosepins mainly among older women or key characters. Sacred ash and flowers are used by some, adding cultural specificity. In contrast, background characters and those in modern or transitional spaces (airports, restaurants, swimming pools) often appear without accessories or makeup, enhancing the naturalistic tone. The film subtly captures generational and cultural nuances through costume and styling, portraying women with authenticity and everyday realism.

4.3.6.12 Raman Abdullah

- **Kalpana:** Kalpana is represented as dark-skinned, in modern attire (salwar or saree) with free hair hairstyle. Minimal makeup includes bindi, lip gloss, eyeliner and kajal, along with accessories like chains, earrings and bangles
- **Kids:** Kids are dark-skinned, wearing modern frocks with ponytail hairstyles. No accessories are used
- **Kalpana's Mother:** She is dark-skinned, wearing a saree with a bun hairstyle. Accessories used include bindi, chains, earrings and bangles
- **Abdulla's Mother:** She is dark-skinned, wearing a saree with a bun hairstyle. Minimal accessories used include chains, bangles and earrings
- **Gowri's Mother:** She is dark-skinned, in a saree with a bun hairstyle adorned with flowers. No additional accessories are used
- **Ayesha's Mother:** She is dark-skinned, in a saree with a bun hairstyle. Accessories used include minimal kajal, chain, earrings and bangles
- **Raman's Mother:** Mother is dark-skinned, in a saree with a bun hairstyle. Accessories used include bangles, earrings and chains
- **Raman's Sister:** She is dark-skinned, wearing a half-saree with a braid hairstyle adorned with flowers. Accessories used include bindi, chains, earrings and bangles

- **Aarathi Girl:** She is fair-skinned, wearing a half-saree with a braid hairstyle. Accessories used include bindi, sacred ash, kajal, chains, earrings and bangles
- **Nurse:** Nurses shown in the hospital are both fair and dark-skinned, present in a uniform with a bun hairstyle. The accessories used include a bindi, watch and stud earrings
- **Wife:** The wife character shown is dark-skinned, wearing a saree with free hair hairstyle mostly. Minimal accessories used include bindi, kajal, chains and earrings
- **Relatives:** The women shown as relatives are mostly dark-skinned and in burkas (used by Muslim religious women). No accessories are used
- **Old Woman on the Road:** The old woman walking on the road in some scenes is projected as dark-skinned, in a saree with a bun hairstyle. No accessories are used
- **Women at the Bus Stand:** Women shown at the bus stand are mostly dark-skinned, wearing both traditional and modern attire (sarees and frocks), with ponytails or braids hairstyles adorned with flowers. Accessories used include bindi, chains and earrings
- **Waitress:** The waitress women are dark-skinned, in a half-saree or salwar with a braid or free hair hairstyle. Accessories used include bindi, kajal, earrings and chains
- **Students in Class:** Women students shown in classroom scenes are a combination of both fair and dark-skinned, present in salwars with braid hairstyles. Minimal accessories used include bindi, watches, earrings and chains
- **Students Outside Tutorial:** They are dark-skinned, in modern attire (skirts and tops or salwars), with ponytails or braid hairstyles. Minimal accessories used include bindi, earrings, chains and bangles
- **Woman in Meeting:** She is fair-skinned, present in a saree or salwar with a ponytail or braid hairstyle. No accessories are used
- **Women in Street/ Background:** Women present in the street or background as fillers are dark and fair-skinned, in a saree with a bun or braid hairstyle. Accessories including sacred ash, bindi, chains and earrings are used
- **Women working on the Road:** The women workers are projected as dark-skinned, in sarees with buns or braids. Minimal accessories include sacred ash, bindi, chains and earrings. No accessories are used

- **Women in Restaurant:** They are dark-skinned, in half-sarees with braid hairstyles. No accessories are used

In Raman Abdullah, the representation of women spans a wide social and cultural spectrum, highlighting a mix of traditional, modern and religious identities. Most women are portrayed with dark skin tones, with occasional appearances of fair-skinned characters. Attire varies from sarees, half-sarees and salwars to burkas and modern frocks, reflecting their roles and cultural contexts. Hairstyles predominantly include buns, braids, ponytails and free hair, often adorned with flowers in traditional settings. Makeup is generally minimal - featuring bindi, kajal, eyeliner, lip gloss and sacred ash - while accessories such as chains, earrings and bangles are used selectively, primarily by central or older female characters.

Women in professions like nurses and waitresses wear uniforms with modest styling, while street and background characters often appear without accessories, grounding the visual narrative in realism. Overall, the film portrays a diverse cross-section of women, from family members and students to workers and bystanders, each styled authentically to reflect their social roles and everyday lives.

4.3.6.13 En Iniya Ponnilave

- **Houseowner:** The house owner is dark-skinned present in a saree with a bun hairstyle. No accessories are used
- **Kid:** The female kid is fair-skinned, in a modern frock with a ponytail hairstyle. Accessories used include earrings and bangles
- **Sister's in Church:** They are dark-skinned, in a sister's gown worn by Christian religion Sisters. Some used chains and others have no accessories
- **Doctor:** A woman doctor is dark-skinned, present in a doctor's coat with a bun hairstyle. No accessories are used
- **Old Lady:** The old lady is dark-skinned, in a saree with a bun hairstyle. She has used bindi, nose pins, chains and earrings
- **Nurse:** The nurse is dark-skinned, in a white uniform with a bun hairstyle. No accessories are used by her

- **Hostel Girls:** A mix of fair and dark-skinned girls are present and dressed in modern outfits like skirts, tops, half sarees and nighties. Some have braids and ponytail hairstyles using chains and earrings
- **Hostel Friend:** The friend is fair-skinned, in a modern frock or nightie with a ponytail or bun hairstyle. Accessories used include bindi, earrings, chains and bangles
- **Mothers of Shiva and Rosie:** The mother character is dark and fair-skinned, in sarees with a bun hairstyle. They have used bindi, chains, earrings and bangles
- **Girl in the Shop:** She is Fair-skinned, in a modern frock with a ponytail hairstyle. No accessories are used
- **Group of Neighbours:** Neighbour women are dark-skinned, in half sarees and sarees with braids and bun hairstyles. Bindi and kajal are used
- **Girl near the Door:** She is dark-skinned, in a half saree with a free hair hairstyle. No accessories are used
- **Receptionist:** She is dark-skinned, in a saree with a ponytail hairstyle. She has used only earrings
- **Sex Worker:** The sex worker woman's character is fair-skinned, present in a modern skirt and top or a blouse and skirt with a braid or bun hairstyle. Bindi, lipstick, chains and earrings are used by them
- **Rosie's Daughter:** She is fair-skinned, in a modern frock with a ponytail hairstyle. No accessories are used
- **Vichitra/Sex Worker:** She is fair-skinned, in a blouse and skirt or sometimes a blouseless saree with a braid or bun hairstyle. Bindi, kajal, chain, earrings, bangles and anklets are used by her
- **Mentally Challenged Guy Dressed as Woman:** The guy represented as a woman is dark-skinned, in a half saree with a braid hairstyle with a bindi
- **Women Audience Watching the Dance:** They are dark-skinned, in a saree with a braid hairstyle. Kajal, bindi and chain with earrings are used
- **People in Church:** Women present in the church are generally fair and dark-skinned, in outfits with braid hairstyles. No accessories are used
- **Other Women in the House:** They are fair and dark-skinned, in sarees and half sarees with braids or bun hairstyles. No accessories are used

- **Woman with Alcohol in Hand:** She is fair-skinned, in a saree with a braid hairstyle and has used bindi, chain and earrings
- **Women Drinking:** They are dark-skinned, in sarees or chudidhars with braids hairstyles and have used bindi, earrings, watches, chains and bangles
- **Women in Building:** In a scene where women present in the building are dark-skinned, in sarees or half sarees with buns or braid hairstyle. They have used bindi, earrings, chains and nose pins
- **Women in Hospital:** They are dark-skinned, in sarees with buns or braid hairstyles without accessories
- **Women Playing Cards:** They are dark-skinned, in sarees or chudidhars with braids or bun hairstyles with bindi, earrings, chains and bangles
- **Women Smoking:** They are dark-skinned, in chudidhars with braids hairstyle with bindi, earrings, watch, chain and bangles
- **Zumba Class:** The women shown in Zumba class are fair and dark-skinned, in modern mini skirts, dresses or t-shirts and pants with ponytails or braid hairstyles. They have used kajal, bindi, earrings, chains, rings and watches

In En Iniya Ponnillave, the portrayal of women encompasses a wide array of social roles and visual styles, reflecting both traditional and modern influences. Women of both fair and dark skin tones are shown in diverse attire, ranging from sarees and half-sarees to modern frocks, nighties and workout clothing.

Hairstyles vary from braids, buns and ponytails to free-flowing hair, often complementing the character's setting or occupation. Traditional characters—such as mothers, neighbors and women in religious roles - are styled minimally with accessories like bindis, chains, earrings and bangles, while more modern or stylized characters, such as sex workers or women in the Zumba class, display a broader range of accessories including kajal, lipstick, anklets and watches. Professional roles like doctors, nurses and receptionists are shown in uniforms with little to no accessories, underscoring realism. Meanwhile, background and filler characters such as hostel girls, church attendees or women in public scenes are dressed modestly with minimal styling.

Overall, the film offers a layered visual representation of women across class, occupation and lifestyle, blending realism with dramatic character styling.

4.3.6.14 Julie Ganapathy

- **Bala's Fan:** They are both dark and fair-skinned, in saree with a braid hairstyle using bindi, chain and earrings
- **Neighbors:** The neighbor women are dark-skinned, in sarees with a bun or braid hairstyle. They have used bindi, with accessories like chains, earrings, nose pins and bangles
- **Neighbour Kid:** The kid is dark-skinned, in a skirt and top with a braid hairstyle
- **Guest:** The guests are fair-skinned, in jeans and a top with free hair hairstyle. Kajal and lipstick, along with accessories like a watch and chain are used
- **Grandmother:** She is dark-skinned, in a saree with a bun hairstyle. Bindi, with earrings, chain and nose pin are used. Sometimes sacred ash on the forehead is used instead of bindi
- **Producer:** The producer is fair-skinned, in salwar with free hair hairstyle. Only bracelets are used
- **Vijaya's Daughter:** She is dark-skinned, present in a skirt and top or frock with a braid hairstyle. Bindi, earrings and chains are used. Also, the other dressing includes uniform and swimwear entries with respective hairstyles and minimal accessories
- **Villagers:** Women villagers are shown as dark-skinned, in sarees with bun hairstyles. Bindi, with accessories like earrings and chains, are used
- **Award Function Audience:** The women audience present at the award function are fair and dark-skinned, in modern attire such as sarees, kurtis, t-shirts and salwars. Hairstyles include braids and ponytails. Bindi, lipstick and kajal, with accessories like earrings, chains and watches are used
- **Woman Watching:** Fair-skinned women present in a salwar with a braid hairstyle without accessories
- **Women near the Shore:** They are Dark-skinned, in saree with a bun hairstyle without any accessories

- **Women in the Press Meet:** The women present in the press meet are fair and dark-skinned, in both modern outfits like sarees and t-shirts. Hairstyles include braids, ponytails and free hair. They have used bindi, along with accessories like earrings, chains and flowers

In Julie Ganapathy , women are portrayed across a range of settings and roles, showcasing both traditional and contemporary styles. Characters include both fair and dark-skinned women dressed in sarees, salwars, kurtis, frocks, skirts and tops, jeans and uniforms, reflecting a mix of rural and urban representations. Hairstyles vary from braids and buns to ponytails and free hair, tailored to the character's context—such as villagers with bun hairstyles and urban guests or press attendees with free hair.

Accessories like bindis, chains, earrings, bangles, nosepins and bracelets are selectively used, with makeup like kajal and lipstick appearing primarily on modern characters or those in public settings like press meets and award functions. Traditional figures such as grandmothers and villagers are presented with minimal yet culturally grounded styling, while younger or more contemporary characters feature modern clothing and subtle fashion elements. Overall, the film presents a broad yet grounded visual spectrum of femininity, balancing cultural norms with individual expression.

4.3.6.15 Adhu Oru Kanaa Kaalam

- **News Reader:** The women news reader is fair-skinned, in a saree with free hair hairstyle. Bindi, lipstick, chain and earrings are used
- **Actress in Dreams:** The actress is represented in fair skin with modern outfits such as a towel, top and mini-skirt or bikini, with free hair hairstyle. Minimal lip gloss, rings, chains and earrings are used
- **Other Kids:** The kids are fair and dark-skinned, in modern outfits like skirts, tops, chudidhars and jeans, with ponytails or braid hairstyles. Bindi, earrings and chains are used
- **Astrologist Lady:** The old lady as an astrologist is dark-skinned, in a saree with a bun hairstyle. No makeup or accessories are used

- **Grandmother:** She is fair-skinned, in a saree with a bun hairstyle. Sacred ash on the forehead and chain are used
- **Women in Restaurants:** They are generally dark and fair-skinned, in attire such as sarees, jeans and tops, with ponytails or braids hairstyle. Bindi, earrings and chains are used
- **Srini's Mother:** Mother is dark-skinned, in a saree with a bun hairstyle, bindi, nose pin, earrings, chain and ring
- **Sathya/Maid:** The maid is dark-skinned, in a saree with a bun hairstyle. She has used sacred ash on her forehead without makeup or accessories
- **Teachers:** The teacher is projected as dark-skinned, in sarees with braids and ponytails hairstyle. Bindi, kajal, earrings, chains, watches and bangles are used
- **Thulasi as a Kid:** The kid character is shown as fair-skinned, in skirts and tops or modern pinafores with ponytails, braids or free hairstyles. Minimal bindi, earrings and chains are used
- **Women in Hospital, Temple and House:** The women shown at various places such as hospitals, temples and houses are dark-skinned and present in sarees with braids or bun hairstyles. They have used bindi, earrings, chains, nose pins and bangles
- **Women on the Road:** They are dark-skinned, in salwars with buns or braids and hairstyles without makeup or accessories
- **Woman on the Bus:** They are fair and dark-skinned, in sarees or salwars, with ponytails, braids or buns hairstyle. Minimal bindi, lipstick, kajal, chain, earrings, nose pins and flowers are used
- **Women in Theatre:** They are dark-skinned, in modern outfits like salwars, shirts and jeans, with ponytails, braids or free hair hairstyles. Bindi, earrings and chains are used
- **Women in Restaurants:** They are generally dark-skinned, in sarees or kurtas, with braids or ponytails hairstyle. Bindi, earrings and chains are used

In *Adhu Oru Kanaa Kaalam*, the portrayal of women spans a broad spectrum of age, background and settings, blending traditional and modern visual elements. Women characters include both fair and dark-skinned individuals dressed in a variety of attires

ranging from sarees and salwars to jeans, tops and even bikinis or towels in dream sequences. Hairstyles like buns, braids, ponytails and free hair are contextually used based on roles, such as news readers, teachers, mothers, maids and children. Accessories like bindi, earrings, chains, nose pins, bangles and rings are common, with makeup such as kajal, lipstick and sacred ash applied selectively depending on character identity urban or rural, spiritual or glamorous. The visual representation emphasizes a realistic and grounded depiction of Tamil women from different walks of life, linking cultural tradition with modern aesthetics.

4.3.6.16 Thalaimuraigal

- **Kids Playing:** Female kids playing in some scenes are dark-skinned and in modern skirts and tops or skirts. Hairstyles include braids, free hair and ponytails. Minimal accessories with chains and sometimes earrings are used
- **Emcee:** The lady Emcee is dark-skinned, in a salwar with a ponytail hairstyle. Used bindi, with accessories like chain, earrings and bracelet
- **Nurse:** The nurse is attired fair and dark-skinned, in a uniform with a bun hairstyle. Bindi, with accessories like a watch, earrings and sometimes chains are used
- **Other Doctor:** The other women doctors are fair-skinned, in salwar with a ponytail hairstyle. Bindi, with accessories like chains, earrings and bangles are used
- **Receptionist:** The receptionist lady is fair-skinned, in a saree with a free hairstyle and has used minimal kajal, with accessories like chain and earrings
- **Subbu's Daughter:** The daughter character is dark-skinned present in salwar, pants or sarees. Hairstyles include free hair or a bun. Kajal or bindi, along with accessories like chains, earrings and bangles are used
- **Shakthi:** She is fair-skinned, in a half saree or salwar with various hairstyles including freehairstyle, braid hairstyle and braids with flowers. Bindi or sacred ash, with accessories like chains, earrings and bangles are used
- **Villager:** The villager women are dark-skinned, in a saree with free hairstyle. No accessories are used
- **Women in Reception:** The women in reception were present in sarees with braid hairstyles. No accessories are used. Women on the dais are dark and fair-skinned,

in sarees with braids or buns hairstyles with bindi and accessories like chain and earrings are used

- **Random Women on the Road:** The random women shown on the road are dark-skinned, in sarees with modern ponytail hairstyles without accessories
- **Women in the Award Function:** They are both dark and fair-skinned, in sarees with braids or bun hairstyles. Bindi, with accessories like chains, earrings and bangles are used

In Thalaimuraigal, women are portrayed across a diverse range of roles, showcasing a blend of traditional and modern representation. Characters include both fair and dark-skinned individuals, with dark-skinned women often appearing in domestic, village or background roles, while fair-skinned women are more commonly seen in professional or prominent roles such as doctors, receptionists and main characters.

Traditional attire like sarees and salwars dominates, accompanied by varied hairstyles including braids, buns, ponytails and free hair, depending on the setting and status of the character. Minimal yet context-appropriate makeup such as bindi, kajal and sacred ash is used, with accessories like earrings, chains, bangles and watches added selectively. Overall, the visual representation emphasizes cultural authenticity, while subtly reinforcing social and aesthetic hierarchies based on skin tone and role significance.

4.3.7 Moral and Cultural Values

Moral and cultural values define the ethics, individual beliefs and behavior that portray their personalities and take on the right and wrongs of societal norms. This reflects the personal choices and understanding of the character's cultural and moral principles. The values of the women characters in Balu Mahendra's film can be categorized under minimal and undefined views, traditional and modern values, progressive views and cultural perspectives.

Indumathi from Azhiyatha Kolangal, Radha in Neengal Kettavai and Vijaya in Julie Ganapathy have values that are not defined in the films anywhere. Viji from Moondram Pirai, with a childlike innocence, has no definite knowledge about the ethics and beliefs of

cultural values. Sudha in *Veedu*, Thulasi in *Rettai Vaal Kuruvi* and Thulasi in *Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam* share a very traditional upbringing and have religious faith and rituals. Radha in *Rettai Vaal Kuruvi* portrays a modern perspective by accepting her pregnancy before marriage, whereas Shenbagam shows a modernized concept of showing one-sided love in her relationship. Tulasi in *Marupadiyum* takes a bold stance on living independently without a husband and rejecting Gowrishankar's love to prove her worth and independence.

Manoranjini from *Vanna Vanna Pookkal* presents bold views on seeking casual relationships whereas, Kavitha from *Marupadiyum* and Priya from *Sathi Leelavathi* fall for a married man and support affairs and pressure their partner to divorce. Leelavathi and Pazhani from *Sathi Leelavathi* don't agree with their husband's love for another woman. Rosie from *En Iniya Ponnillave* and Julie from *Julie Ganapathy* support other religious and cultural practices; Rosie, being a Christian, wears a bindi and Julie shows cultural unity through her name. Stella from *Thalaimuraigal* marries from another religion and shows openness to her son learning about different cultures and religions. Gowri & Ayesha from *Raman Abdullah* supports love and friendship across religious boundaries, despite having a regressive family.

This shows that the moral and cultural values are depicted based on the storyline and that is also aligned with the women protagonists present in the Balu Mahendra films.

4.3.8 Role and Reflection of the Society

Characters in films reflect societal norms and mirror the society they depict through different aspects of their lives, such as fashion, economic conditions and cultural practices through actions and interactions.

Indumathi from *Azhiyatha Kolangal*, Radha from *Neengal Kettavai*, Padma from *Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthaal* and Viji from *Moondram Pirai* reflect societal trends through their outfits and fashion of their times. Rekha in *Moodu Pani* represents a modern girl with trendy outfits and trends through her attire. Radha from *Rettai Vaal Kuruvi* addresses

controversial topics like sex education and premarital pregnancy. Radha and Rosie in *En Iniya Ponnilave* portray teenage pregnancy and challenges that society considers taboo.

The financial struggles of the society by Sudha in *Veedu* portrays the struggles of a lower-middle-class breadwinner woman in a family and Thulasi in *Sandhya Raagam* gives out the most real reflection of the society, showing the financial problems of people who live in Chennai as an artist and how an unexpected relative who lives with them becomes an extra burden in the family's struggle.

Thulasi in *Rettai Vaal kuruvi*, Leelavathi, Pazhani in *Sathi Leelavathi* and Thulasi in *Marupadiyum* reflect the hardships and emotional vulnerability women face when their husband cheats on them and portray a regressive attitude. Thulasi in *Marupadiyum* face personal growth and the courage of living alone. Priya in *Sathi Leelavathi*, looking for a wealthy partner, reflects societal pressure on socioeconomic status. Kavitha in *Marupadiyum* and Julie in *Julie Ganapathy* showcase how society handles people with mental health issues and the problems that arise as they do not get consulted with a psychiatrist. Stella in *Thalaimuraigal* and Gowri & Ayesha in *Raman Abdullah* reflect modern values and cultural acceptance of different religions through Stella supporting her son's learning of new religion and tradition and Gowri showing love across religious boundaries.

4.4 Results From In-Depth Interview

Five artists who worked under Balu Mahendra's direction were interviewed. Among them, two female characters such as Archana & Vinodhini and three male characters such as Pandiarajan, Ramesh Aravind and Vignesh were interviewed. All of them are asked questions related to the variables such as Favorite Director, Favorite Characters in Tamil Films, Favorite Characters in Balu Mahendra Films, Balu Mahendra as an Auteur, Importance given to the roles in Balu Mahendra Films, Experience in acting in the Balu Mahendra and other director films, Significance of Women Characters in Balu Mahendra Films, Reflection of social reality in Balu Mahendra Films, Appreciation & Criticism for acting in Balu Mahendra's Tamil films, Acting or performance inputs from Balu Mahendra,

Gender balance by Balu Mahendra and Suggestion for present artists in Tamil Film Industry. The results are presented based on the individual artists interviewed.

4.4.1 In-Depth Interview Result of Ms. Archana, Actress

To speak with Archana, a celebrated actress best known for her raw, naturalistic performances in Tamil parallel cinema, is to witness a deeply personal chapter in Indian film history. Though her career spans numerous impactful roles, it is her collaboration with auteur Balu Mahendra that remains a defining period not just professionally, but spiritually, as she often describes. In this extensive conversation, Archana reflects on her artistic journey with Balu Mahendra, how he shaped her identity as an actress and the nuanced ways in which he portrayed women in his films. "Many people rejected me" Archana begins candidly. "But Balu Mahendra had faith. He believed in me even before I believed in myself. He told me I would win a National Award and it came true with *Veedu*. That's not just a director. That's a guru". Archana considers herself a discovery of Balu Mahendra. While she had been part of films before, it was under Balu Mahendra's lens that she blossomed into a National Icon of realistic performance. "From none to the National Award, he made it happen. He saw something in me. That's why many people wrote in the papers 'Archana, the queen of parallel cinema'. And that's the highest honor I've ever received".

Across four impactful films *Neengal Kettavai* (1984), *Rettai Vaal Kuruvi* (1987), *Veedu* (1988) and *Sandhya Raagam* (1989) - Archana brought to life characters who reflected the day-to-day struggles and triumphs of ordinary people, particularly women. "He had this rare ability" she explains, "to bring next-door people into the cinema. His characters weren't stars they were us. That was his genius". She recalls how Balu Mahendra gave her the lead role in *Veedu*, despite having been rejected from two films prior. "One day, I heard he was searching for me. I met him and he took some photographs. After a month, he called and said, 'You are the heroine of my next film'. That changed my life". Of all her roles, *Veedu* remains closest to Archana's heart. "It's a universal film" she says with pride. "It shows the dreams of a woman how she wants to build a house for her family. It's about the middle-class struggles we all go through. That role represented 99% of the population, especially women".

The story of Veedu a woman single-handedly managing to build a home resonated deeply with audiences. "It's not just about laying bricks. It's about sacrifice, determination and love" she explains. "Balu Mahendra captured that beautifully. He brought all the aesthetic values into that emotional story". A particularly memorable moment during the filming was on the very first day.

"We were supposed to shoot at 6 AM, but everyone arrived only by 7AM. Suddenly, the sky turned cloudy. I said the shoot might get cancelled. But Balu Mahendra simply said, 'Bring the camera'. He shot the scene in the rain. That scene became one of the best performances of my acting career and also the most memorable in the movie. That's his brilliance he sees beauty in spontaneity".

Archana repeatedly returns to one thing Balu Mahendra's films reflect reality. "He was not trying to make heroes and heroines" she says. He was showing life as it is. The rain, the silence, the hesitation in a conversation everything mattered. His approach to performance was equally simple yet profound. He would say, 'Don't act. Just follow what I say. That will be enough'. There was no dramatics, no artificiality. It was all natural.

That simplicity, however, required great emotional intelligence and presence. "Being natural is the hardest thing", she adds. In terms of gender dynamics, Archana insists that Balu Mahendra never prioritized male or female characters for the sake of it. "Both genders were important only based on the script. If the story required a woman to lead, she would lead. If it needed a man, so be it. There was no ego in that".

One of Balu Mahendra's greatest legacies is his portrayal of women nuanced, complex and dignified. "He never discouraged anyone" Archana says. "Whether it was a small or big role, he gave equal importance. He would highlight the character's profession, sacrifice, time and commitment in the narrative". She fondly remembers how many people advised her against playing a pregnant woman in Veedu. "They thought it would affect my image" she says. "But I believed in my guru. I knew this role would be important for my career and I was right". Archana also admires how Balu Mahendra drew inspiration from his own life to portray women. "Veedu is about his mother and the struggles she faced. Sandhya

Raagam is dedicated to his father. Every woman character he created had some personal connection his family, his memories, his experiences".

When asked about her favorite female character in a Balu Mahendra film, Archana immediately mentions Sridevi in *Moondram Pirai*. "She was bold not just in dress or style, but in performance. She played a very difficult role with a childlike innocence. And Kamal? He was not a superstar in that film he was a human being. That's Balu Mahendra's transformation power". She also praises Marupadiyum, especially the way Balu Mahendra elevated Revathy's performance. "He brought Revathy to the next level. Every frame brought out a new layer in her. That's what he could do with actors he would make you discover yourself".

A recurring theme in some of Balu Mahendra's works like *Rettai Vaal Kuruvi* is extra marital relationships. "Yes, he handled that theme in a few movies", Archana acknowledges. "Maybe it was because of how much he observed in society. He was always influenced by what he saw around him. In *Rettai Vaal Kuruvi*, I liked how he approached the subject commercially because 75% of women in society face that issue in some form. It's a societal problem and he didn't shy away from showing it".

Despite being a master of the craft, Balu Mahendra never distanced himself from his audience or his crew. "He respected human values" Archana says. "If a fan asked for a photo, he would take it with them, print it himself and hand it to them. That was his humility". She also admired his calm and steady approach on set. "No shouting, no chaos. He gave simple, clear instructions. He would explain everything patiently. Acting under him was never stressful it was meditative". Archana ends the interview with quiet dignity, offering no advice to future generations but rather a reflection. "Generations have changed" she says simply. "I won't give advice. But I will say this if you ever get a teacher like Balu Mahendra, don't let go".

4.4.2 In-Depth Interview Result of Ms. Vinodini, Actress

Actress Vinodhini, who has been in the Tamil film industry for over four decades, speaks with passion, reverence and humility about her long journey in cinema. Introduced as a

child artist, she grew up on film sets and one of the most pivotal influences in her career has been the legendary filmmaker Balu Mahendra. "I was introduced to cinema as a child artist. This is my 40th year in the industry and I still love my work like I did on day one. To me, cinema is not just a job it is something I worship". Vinodhini speaks about her journey not just with pride but with a quiet intensity. She holds a deep admiration for directors like Bharathiraja, Balachandar, Balu Mahendra and more recently, Lokesh Kanagaraj, Mari Selvaraj and Vetrimaaran filmmakers who she feels are transforming Tamil cinema while staying rooted in its emotional core.

If there is one name that instantly brings a shift in Vinodhini's tone a combination of fondness and deep respect it is Balu Mahendra. "He was more than a father figure to me" she says. "He wasn't just a director or cinematographer. He was someone who shaped my identity in cinema". She recalls being just a schoolgirl in 9th standard when she was cast in Vanna Vanna Pookal. "I didn't know anything back then. But he gave me a good role and such a meaningful script. At that time, I didn't understand its value. Only after 15 years did I fully realize how impactful that role was". Vinodhini emphasizes how Balu Mahendra never treated roles based on hierarchy or star value. "He told me, 'Give importance to the role not whether it's a protagonist or antagonist'. That changed the way I approached my characters". In Marupadiyum, though Revathy played the lead, Vinodhini's performance was widely appreciated by audiences, critics and even Revathy herself. "She came and appreciated my work. That's the kind of environment Balu Mahendra created. There was no competition. Only art".

One of Balu Mahendra's defining traits was his insistence on naturalism. "He taught me how to emote naturally. No overacting. No dramatization. Everything had to be subtle but impactful". She remembers how Balu Mahendra would avoid heavy makeup or artificial lighting. "He would say, 'Just wash your face, put on some lipstick. No need to comb your hair'. He believed in showing women as they are. Real, raw and beautiful". This minimalist aesthetic wasn't just visual it extended to the acting style as well. "He would guide us in each shot. He'd explain what the character feels, how the frame is composed and how the light falls. It was like being in a film school every single day".

Vinodhini calls Balu Mahendra one of the greatest cinematographers Indian cinema has ever produced. "His knowledge about frame and lens was unmatched. And the best part? He shared that knowledge with us. That kind of technical insight is so rare in today's film sets". She notes that shooting in natural light especially early mornings was a unique learning experience. "Most of his films had those golden-hour scenes. He used light like a brush on canvas. That's something only a true visual poet can do".

Balu Mahendra's representation of women, Vinodhini believes, was deeply grounded in realism. "His women characters weren't larger-than-life heroines. They were ordinary women facing real problems financial stress, emotional conflicts, social judgment". She points out that in many of his films, two women characters are central to the story, often representing contrasting perspectives on life. "He dealt with their practical issues, the choices they made and the consequences they faced. That's what made them relatable". Even secondary characters like maids or supporting roles were given depth. "Take Sathi Leelavathi. Even the maid gets importance in a scene. That's very rare in Tamil cinema, especially during that time". Addressing the recurring theme of extramarital relationships in Balu Mahendra's work, Vinodhini believes it was a bold but necessary choice. "Just like Bharathiraja in *Mudhal Mariyadhai* or some of Balachandar's films, Balu sir wasn't afraid to touch upon uncomfortable truths. He knew these were realities that people were hesitant to discuss but were experiencing in their lives". Films like *Marupadiyum* gave a voice to women dealing with betrayal and reclaiming self-worth. "These themes weren't handled for shock value. They were portrayed with dignity, honesty and introspection".

There has been a notion that Balu Mahendra only cast women with dark skin tones. Vinodhini clarifies this. "That's simply not true. He cast Ramya Krishnan, Revathy, Kalpana and Kovai Sarala many actresses with fairer skin. What he gave importance to was real skin tone, not artificial makeup". She adds that the frequent use of black metal jewelry and minimal costume glamor might have come from his Sri Lankan roots. "That aesthetic could have been inspired by Sri Lankan women. But it was never about typecasting. It was about authenticity".

While Vinodhini cherishes her work in Vanna Vanna Pookal, it wasn't without its share of backlash. "Some people criticized me for wearing short clothes in the film. Magazines wrote about it. Even relatives had things to say. But I didn't take it seriously. I knew I was doing meaningful work". Despite that, the love and appreciation she received outweighed the negativity. "People appreciated my performance. And that's what matters to me". Asked about her favorite male character in Balu Mahendra's films, Vinodhini quickly mentions the old man from Veedu. "His portrayal of masculinity wasn't about bravado. It was about vulnerability, silence, dignity. That's why it resonated". She praises how Balu Mahendra didn't glorify traditional male heroism, but rather showcased the emotional landscapes of his male characters with the same depth as his female ones.

Vinodhini firmly believes that if Balu Mahendra were alive today, he would still be making films the same way. "His style, his values, his sensitivity they are timeless. He wouldn't change for trends. He had a vision and he stayed true to it". She hopes newer generations of filmmakers take inspiration from his work. "Today's artists should understand that cinema is a family. Respect the profession and respect those who came before you. Be cautious in what you do, but always stay grounded".

Through the lens of Vinodhini's memories and insights, Balu Mahendra emerges as more than a filmmaker he becomes a mentor, a craftsman and a torchbearer of truth in cinema. His women were not fantasy figures they were reflections of real lives, with all their flaws, grace, strength and sorrow.

4.4.3 In-Depth Interview Result of Mr. Ramesh Aravind, Actor & Film Director

Ramesh Aravind, one of South India's most versatile actors and an accomplished director, has carved a space for himself in Indian cinema as a compelling storyteller. Known for his expressive performances and articulate mind, Aravind sat down for a heartfelt conversation about the late Balu Mahendra a filmmaker he credits not only as a mentor but as a genius whose work shaped his journey in film.

"I consider myself a creative storyteller", Ramesh begins. "Connecting people, making them feel, think and reflect through stories that's what I love to do. But Balu Mahendra, he wasn't just a storyteller he was a cinematic genius". Known for over 150 acting roles and several directorial ventures, Ramesh doesn't hesitate to declare that his creative foundation was strengthened by working with giants like K. Balachander and Balu Mahendra. "Balachander sir is a master in everything writing, directing and performing. His boldness in subject choices was unmatched. But if he's my first favorite, then Balu Mahendra is right there as my second. A completely different kind of master".

Of all his films, Sathi Leelavathi holds a special place in Ramesh Aravind's heart. "That role changed a lot for me. It's been more than 25 years and even now people walk up to me and say, 'Aren't you the guy from Sathi Leelavathi?' That's the power of Balu Mahendra's cinema. He made something so rooted in everyday life but turned it into timeless comedy". Ramesh recalls how the story, centered around the theme of extramarital affairs, could have easily become controversial or crude in lesser hands. But Balu sir handled it with such fineness, such dignity. It was a comedy, yes, but the underlying message about marriage, temptation and forgiveness was so beautifully etched. He admits that he accepted the role instantly, simply because Balu Mahendra had asked. "That kind of trust you place in a director is rare. He saw something in me and gave me a role that was not just humorous but carried emotional weight. That movie was a turning point. Kamal Haasan noticed me after that. It was a feather in my cap".

Ramesh Aravind recalls Balu Mahendra's quiet working style on set. "He would never raise his voice. Never impose anything. If you were uncomfortable with a shot, he wouldn't push you. He'd change the lighting, alter the camera angle he'd make the scene work for the actor, not the other way around". This artist-first approach left a deep impression. "As a director now, I follow the same principle. Make the actor feel safe and confident. When you do that, you get the best out of them. I learned that from Balu Mahendra". Describing Balu Mahendra's presence on set, Ramesh says, "He was incredibly soft-spoken. He treated everyone equally be it a lead actor or a technician. But behind that gentleness was a man with rich cinematic depth. His understanding of cinema, especially visual storytelling, was phenomenal".

Aravind praises Balu Mahendra's distinctive cinematic voice "He could bring local actors to an international level simply through the way he presented them. No gimmicks. Just the right emotion, in the right light, at the right moment". Before Sathi Leelavathi, Ramesh worked with Balu Mahendra in the Hindi film *Aur Ek Prem Kahani* (a remake of the Kannada film *Kokila*), starring Revathy and Heera. "It was my first film under his direction. I saw firsthand how deeply he cared about realism. There were no commercial distractions. Just pure, emotional storytelling". As the conversation moves toward Balu Mahendra's women characters, Ramesh says "He had a tender understanding of female characters. Whether it was Revathy in *Marupadiyum*, Archana in *Veedu* or the comedic but layered women in *Sathi Leelavathi*, he gave them dignity, space and emotional gravitas". What impressed him most was Balu Mahendra's ability to avoid clichés. "He didn't portray women as mere romantic interests or victims. His female characters had agency. They had professions, inner conflicts and emotional strength".

Two of Ramesh's all-time favorite female characters in Tamil cinema Sujatha in *Aval Oru Thodarkathai* and Nandhini in *Manathil Uruthi Vendum* also reflect the same principles Balu Mahendra believed in. "Both are strong, independent, yet vulnerable in their ways. That's the kind of layered writing I admire". One of the most insightful reflections Ramesh offers is how Balu Mahendra approached character importance. "He didn't believe in giving dominance to a gender. For him, what mattered was the feeling of the scene and the integrity of the story. Whether male or female, every character had to contribute to the emotional arc". This neutrality brought balance to his films, where characters weren't defined by gendered stereotypes but by emotional authenticity. "He gave importance to what the character meant in the grand scheme. That's what makes his storytelling so timeless".

Ramesh, who has worked under many filmmakers, points out a rare cinematic practice that Balu Mahendra followed religiously shooting in natural light. "No one understood light like he did. He never allowed artificial lighting or thick makeup. He loved natural skin tone and he'd go to great lengths to preserve it on screen". This obsession with realism extended to acting too. "He never wanted drama. He wanted the truth. Acting had to be subtle and believable. He could capture life in its rawest form without losing cinematic beauty".

As a veteran actor and filmmaker himself, Ramesh Aravind leaves the interview with a message to today's generation of artists. "Don't blindly follow trends. Everyone now wants to keep a beard, look macho and do similar kinds of scenes. That's not cinema. That's repetition". He urges young artists to bring their individuality into their work. "Create your style in acting, in dance, in emotion. Add something of your own to every scene. That's what makes you memorable".

4.4.4 In-Depth Interview Result of Mr. Vignesh, Actor

Actor Vignesh, known for his nuanced performances and grounded approach to cinema, has been part of the Tamil film industry since his teenage years. He delved into his experiences working briefly with the legendary Balu Mahendra, the influence the director had on his career and his admiration for the way Balu Mahendra represented women in Tamil cinema. Vignesh begins the conversation by talking about his artistic approach. "For me, it's not about just acting. It's about becoming the character itself. The transformation has to be internal. That's how I approach every role". This mindset, he reveals, is something he deepened after observing Balu Mahendra's directorial methods. "Balu sir had this ability to draw performances out of actors that didn't feel like performances. He pushed us to be, not to act".

Vignesh, who was introduced to the world of cinema at the age of 15, also began studying direction early in his career. His artistic growth, he says, owes much to observing filmmakers like Balu Mahendra, Bharathiraja and K. Balachander his three favorite directors. "All three of them shaped Tamil cinema in different ways. Balachander was a master of bold subjects and dialogues. Bharathiraja brought the soul of rural Tamil Nadu into films. And Balu Mahendra he captured life itself on celluloid". Though he was initially cast in a Balu Mahendra film and worked for seven days on the project, Vignesh had to leave the shoot due to unforeseen issues. Yet, those seven days were transformational. "Even though I couldn't continue with the role, just being on his set was a revelation. He didn't need dozens of assistants. He did everything lighting, camera, direction himself. His hands knew cinema like a sculptor knows clay".

Vignesh recalls the quietude of the shooting spot: "There was no shouting, no confusion. Just pure focus. He was the first one to arrive at the location 6 AM sharp and the last one to leave. That kind of dedication is rare". The lessons Vignesh learned during those few days stuck with him forever. "Balu Mahendra taught me how to observe a character and deliver dialogues not like an actor, but like a real person. He would say, 'Feel the body language, internalize the emotion and the words will follow'. That helped me move away from theatricality toward realism". He recalls a moment when Balu Mahendra appreciated his improvisation during a scene. "That one compliment meant the world to me. Because I knew it came from someone who saw cinema with clarity and depth".

Vignesh holds great admiration for Balu Mahendra's portrayal of women. "If you look at his best works *Azhiyatha Kolangal*, *Moondram Pirai*, *Veedu*, *Marupadiyum* you'll see that the story flows through the female characters. They aren't side roles; they are the emotional anchors of the film". He adds, "Big directors like Balu Mahendra gave importance to women not out of trend, but from genuine artistic integrity. His women were complex, layered and deeply human. You could see that he was inspired by real-life women people he had observed, known, maybe even loved". Vignesh's favorite female character in Tamil cinema is Amala, an actress he sees as embodying grace and depth.

A topic often raised in discussions about Balu Mahendra is his casting of women with darker complexions, leading to debates about whether he deliberately avoided fair-skinned actresses. Vignesh addresses this thoughtfully. "It's not about color. It's about nativity. He believed black is beautiful and he cast according to what the story needed". He points out that actresses like Revathy, Heera, Kalpana and even Kovai Sarala all of varied skin tones found meaningful roles in Balu Mahendra's films. "His focus was on authenticity. If a character was from a small village, she had to look the part. That's realism". Vignesh returns often to Balu Mahendra's mastery of cinematography. "There's no one like him when it comes to natural lighting. He could make a sunrise feel like a poem. His frames had a soul". He explains how the director's visuals were never just aesthetic, but emotional. "In *Moondram Pirai*, the light doesn't just fall on Sridevi it embraces her. That's how he conveyed vulnerability. In *Azhiyatha Kolangal*, the diffused light brings out the nostalgia of adolescence. He used the camera to feel emotions, not just to see them".

Another standout quality of Balu Mahendra's direction, Vignesh emphasizes, was his egalitarian approach to characters. "In his scripts, men and women had equal footing. Even in stories with multiple protagonists, each character had depth and purpose". This approach, Vignesh believes, made audiences emotionally invested in all characters, not just the leads. "You can't take anyone for granted in a Balu Mahendra film. Everyone is essential to the story's soul".

Vignesh also praises Balu Mahendra's contribution as an educator. "Starting his film institute was one of the greatest things he did. He democratized knowledge. Whether you were a budding director, a camera assistant or a junior artist he believed in teaching cinema to all". The educational side of Balu Mahendra's personality reflected his social commitment. "He wasn't just making films. He was creating a culture of understanding cinema better".

When asked what advice he would give to younger artists today, Vignesh channels the values he observed in Balu Mahendra's life and work. "Be patient. Believe in yourself. Work hard. But more than that, give importance to skill. Learn your craft. Don't be in a hurry to be seen or in a hurry to be good". He warns against blindly following trends or glamour. "Acting is not about wearing designer clothes or speaking stylishly. It's about making the audience forget that you're acting. That's what Balu Mahendra made us understand".

4.4.5 In-Depth Interview Result of Mr. Pandiarajan, Actor & Film Director

Pandiarajan is a Director and Actor who has worked with over 85 directors as an actor and directed many films across his career. Pandiarajan's reverence for director stands out above all which is K Bhagyaraj and Balu Mahendra. In this heartfelt and revealing conversation, Pandiarajan opens up about the unforgettable experience of working with Balu Mahendra, the meticulous craft he witnessed firsthand and his insights into how women were represented in Balu Mahendra's Tamil films.

Pandiarajan begins the conversation with a tone of deep respect and admiration. "Balu Mahendra is a legend" he says. Further, he said "The very opportunity to speak about him itself makes me extremely happy. He was not just a director he was a school, a university of cinema". As a young man captivated by cinema, Pandiarajan watched Moondram Pirai repeatedly, sometimes up to four times a day. "I was a fanboy" he admits. "That film is like a cinema dictionary. Every shot, every edit it teaches you something. The film itself is structured with editing as its backbone. It's not just storytelling; it's craft in its purest form".

Pandiarajan recalls how he got the opportunity to work with Balu Mahendra soon after his directorial debut, Aan Paavam. "Within a year, I got the chance to act in En Iniya Ponnilave. I came into cinema accidentally as an actor my passion was always direction. But Balu sir saw something in me. He believed I was the right choice for the role and who was I to question his vision?" He remembers being humbled and slightly intimidated. "Learning even 1% from Balu Mahendra is difficult" he says. "He operated at a different level. But what I gained was immeasurable".

Balu Mahendra's approach to filmmaking, according to Pandiarajan, was that of an auteur in the truest sense. "His pen is the camera" he says emphatically. "Two important qualities make him an auteur he writes his scripts visually and he builds the film through the lens. His camera speaks as much as his characters". From script preparation to execution, Balu Mahendra was deeply involved. "He would narrate the script like a movie itself" Pandiarajan remembers. "For two and a half hours, he would tell you the story in such detail that you could visualize every frame. That's how prepared he was. Every shot, every line of dialogue, every pause it was already clear in his mind".

Pandiarajan stresses that realism was the bedrock of Balu Mahendra's cinema. "He always insisted on bringing reality into every frame" he says. "From costumes to lighting to set design, everything had to feel real. He preferred realistic attire for characters and even skin tone was chosen based on what the character required not commercial demands". His attention to detail extended to all aspects of production. "Camera leveling was an art to him" Pandiarajan explains. "He would instruct the cinematographers and even hold the

camera himself if needed. The way he dressed shirt, jeans, cap and cooling glasses was iconic. Every director wanted a photo with that signature Balu Mahendra camera look".

When asked about how acting under Balu Mahendra differed from working with other directors, Pandiarajan is clear. "In most movies, you just do what the director says. But with Balu Mahendra, you learn even before you start acting. It's like learning from the school before the scene starts. The inputs he gave whether for body language, dialogue delivery or emotional depth were grounded in reality". Pandiarajan emphasizes that Balu Mahendra believed a director should be at least 60% actor. "He acted out the scenes for us. He didn't just direct he became the character and showed us what he wanted. That's how committed he was".

A significant part of the conversation revolves around Balu Mahendra's portrayal of women a subject often analyzed by critics and scholars alike. According to Pandiarajan, Balu Mahendra's women were always rooted in the reality of the world around them. "He drew inspiration from society" Pandiarajan says. "His female characters weren't idealized or glorified they were real. They came from different backgrounds, had different shades of skin and spoke in a way that felt authentic. He didn't cast based on commercial beauty standards. He cast based on what the story required". He cites Sridevi's role in Moondram Pirai as a prime example. "Her character had a childlike innocence and she performed it so convincingly. Kamal, on the other hand, played it like a normal man not a hero. That's the difference. Balu Mahendra removed the glamour and brought in humanit".

Pandiarajan adds that this focus on realism extended to how relationships were portrayed. "There was no exaggeration. Whether it was love, pain or confusion it all felt deeply human. That's how he represented women. They weren't just accessories to the male protagonist. They had depth, agency and a story of their own". Despite being a powerhouse of talent a director, scriptwriter, cinematographer, editor and even actor Balu Mahendra carried himself with calm confidence. "He never got confused" Pandiarajan says. "He gave bold instructions but was always patient. He would explain everything to the technicians. He didn't raise his voice. He led with clarity". That clarity, according to Pandiarajan, came from a deep understanding of the medium. "Watching Tamil films is like daily exercise for

me, but watching Balu Mahendra's films now that's education. He's an open book. If you watch closely, he teaches you everything about cinema".

As the conversation draws to a close, Pandiarajan reflects on how the landscape of cinema has changed and what today's artists can learn from Balu Mahendra. "Today, the technology is advanced. Cameras are better, editing is faster and everything is available at the click of a button. But what matters still is the story. It should amuse, surprise and move the audience. That was Balu Mahendra's core belief". Pandiarajan ends with a note of encouragement: "The world will try to degrade you from all sides. But if you have confidence, if you have truth in your craft like Balu Mahendra did, you will survive. You will shine".

CHAPTER - 5

RESULTS

5.1 Overview

This chapter presents the major findings of the study based on the results collected through ethnographic content analysis and in-depth interview methods. The discussion section highlights and correlates the findings with the theoretical framework of the study. The chapter also presents information about the conclusion, limitations and recommendations.

5.2 Major Findings From Ethnographic Content Analysis

- The name Thulasi appears in multiple films (Rettai Vaal Kuruvi, Sandhya Raagam, Marupadiyum, Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam). This suggests that either the same character was revisited in different stories or the name was popularly used for different roles
- Julie Ganapathy is the name of both the film and one of its characters, indicating a title role
- In Vanna Vanna Pookkal, two characters (Shenbagam and Manoranjini) were associated with the film
- In Marupadiyum, both Thulasi and Kavitha are listed, implying significant female roles.
- Sathi Leelavathi features three different characters (Priya, Leelavathi, Pazhani), suggesting a complex narrative with multiple key female roles
- Raman Abdullah includes both Ayesha and Gowri, possibly indicating dual female leads.
- Archana has the highest number of appearances (4), featuring in Veedu, Sandhya Raagam, Rettai Vaal Kuruvi and Neengal Kettavai. This indicates that she played significant roles in multiple films

- Shobha (Azhiyatha Kolangal, Moodu Pani) and Mounika (Vanna Vanna Pookkal, En Iniya Ponnillave) appeared in two films each, showing their recurring presence in notable films
- Most artists, including renowned ones like Sridevi, Radhika, Revathi, Ramya Krishnan, Heera and Priyamani, appeared in only one film from this list
- The distribution of artists across different films highlights the diversity of female leads in Tamil cinema
- While some actresses were repeatedly cast in similar roles (Archana), others appeared in a single, perhaps iconic, role (Sridevi in Moondram Pirai)
- Most of the actresses who acted in Balu Mahendra films are experienced or well-established actresses. Only two out of sixteen are debut actresses introduced by him
- Most protagonists fall into the late 20s category, indicating a preference for mature, experienced characters in the narratives
- A significant portion of protagonists are in their early 20s, likely portraying young adults navigating new challenges, such as career beginnings, relationships or self-discovery
- The teens category has the lowest representation, suggesting that stories centered around teenage characters are less common in Balu Mahendra Films
- The largest portion of women protagonists are housewives, indicating that many narratives focus on domestic life, family dynamics and the challenges faced by women in traditional roles
- A considerable number of protagonists fall under the "Not Mentioned" category, suggesting that their professions are either not relevant to the storyline or the focus is on their journey rather than their career
- The presence of students as protagonists indicates that coming-of-age, educational or youth centric themes are explored in some narratives
- Teachers (9%) play a notable role, possibly portraying themes of education and social influence
- Other professions such as singer, social worker, actress, government employee and bank employee each account for around 4%-5%, indicating limited but diverse representations

- The majority of the women protagonists are portrayed as Hindu religion whereas small numbers are represented as Christian and only one character is represented as Muslim
- The largest proportion of protagonists is committed, indicating that romantic relationships play a significant role in many narratives
- A 1/4th of the protagonists are married, indicating that many films explore themes of married life, family struggles or spousal relationships
- A fair number of protagonists are single, possibly focusing on themes of independence, self-discovery or career-oriented narratives
- Divorced protagonists make up a smaller portion, suggesting that while stories of separation and second chances are present, they are less common
- Most of the women protagonists in Balu Mahendra films are clearly in Tamil dialect. The use of dialogues ensures the importance of the Tamil language. Stella's Character in the Thalaimuraigal movie uses English most but later the character is shown as learning Tamil and speaking well in it
- Only the Pazhani Character in the 'SathiLeelavathi' movie uses 'Coimbatore' region slang. All other characters are framed in a neutral Tamil Dialect
- The majority of the women protagonists are represented in dark skin tones in Balu Mahendra movies. This represents the normal skin tone of people in Tamil Nadu and the natural connection of characters with the audience
- The majority of the women protagonists are tall and equal to the height of the actor in Balu Mahendra movies. This underscores the practice that women should be shorter than men. Balu Mahendra broke that stereotype in his movies
- Concerning weight, most of the women characters are represented as medium weight followed by skinny. Very few characters which required to be overweight according to the characterization are represented as overweight
- The strong influence of wearing sarees in Balu Mahendra films, particularly for women protagonists is visible. However, younger characters or roles with a modern touch often featured Half Sarees/Skirts or Kurti / Chudidhar, adding variety to costume design. The attire choice is likely influenced by the character's age, social setting and cultural background in the storyline

- Actresses like Archana and Revathi appear to wear mostly traditional attire across different films, whereas actresses like Shobha, Sridevi and Priyamani are shown in Western clothing in some roles
- This indicates that costume choices are heavily influenced by the character's persona, setting and the film's period
- Jean & Shirt and Skirt & Top were used in a few films, likely for modernized or youthful characters
- Frocks appeared in films featuring characters in childhood or with a softer, innocent image
- Nightwear was mainly seen in films where certain scenes required it, as seen in "SathiLeelavathi" and "Rettai Vaal Kuruvi"
- The distribution of attire reflects evolving fashion trends in Tamil cinema, with some films embracing Western influences while others remain rooted in traditional attire
- Except for two women protagonists, all others use both traditional and modern hairstyles. The representation of women's hairstyles in scenes is used appropriately based on the requirements of the scene
- The majority of the women protagonists are using minimal makeup in Balu Mahendra Films. He prefers the realistic and aesthetic skin tone to the heavy makeup that is intended to look dramatic
- Almost every actress in the Balu Mahendra movie wore subtle jewelry, suggesting that minimalistic and elegant jewelry styles were commonly used in his films, likely to match traditional or naturalistic portrayals. A smaller number of actresses wore extravagant accessories, which may indicate roles that required grandeur, wealth or festive occasions in the film
- Concerning the movie setting, the majority of the settings are urban, indicating that most of the focus, events or subjects belong to an urban environment
- Rural (17%) (Orange segment): A smaller portion is set in a rural environment, suggesting less representation or focus on rural settings
- Films with a single strong protagonist (e.g., Veedu, Marupadiyum, Moondram Pirai) tend to have a longer screen presence for the lead

- Films with ensemble casts (e.g., Sathi Leelavathi, Raman Abdullah) distribute screen time across multiple characters
- Screen presence is not always proportional to the number of scenes—some leads have fewer but longer scenes, while others appear in many short-duration scenes
- Genre plays a role in protagonist screen time, with dramas giving more focus to leads and comedies or multi-character films sharing screen presence
- Concerning the attitude of the characters, most of them are shown as brave, independent and outspoken. Few characters are shown as humble and vulnerable according to the situation present in the scene. The attitude of the character representation majorly relies on the nature of the character portrayed as well as the scenes and situations present in the film
- The majority of characters follow a flat arc, meaning they remain largely unchanged throughout the story. Instead of experiencing internal change, they influence the world around them
- A significant portion of characters undergo transformative arcs, indicating a deep change in their beliefs, values or identities throughout the story
- 22% of characters are built with positive arcs and these characters experience growth and improvement, learning valuable lessons and evolving into better versions of themselves
- In the smallest group, fall arcs represent characters who decline morally, emotionally or psychologically, often leading to tragic outcomes
- Indumathi from Azhiyadha Kolangal, Radha from Neengal Kettavai, Padma from Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthal, Gowri from Raman Abdullah, Rosie from En Iniya Ponnilave, Vijaya from Julie Ganapathy and Stella from Thalaimuraigal are represented with flat character arc representation. The flat arc suggests that the character does not undergo significant internal change but remains steadfast in their beliefs or personality. The transformative arc signifies that the character undergoes significant internal change, personal growth or a shift in perspective throughout the story
- Rekha from Moodu Pani, Viji from Moondram Pirai, Thulasi from Rettai Vaal Kuruvi, Thulasi from Sandhya Raagam and Thulasi from Marupadiyum have represented with transformative arc structure

- Sudha from Veedu, Leelavathi from Sathi Leelavathi and Thulasi from Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam are represented with positive character arc structure. A positive arc shows how a character overcomes struggles, learn from experiences and grow into a better version of themselves by the end of the story
- Manoranjini from Vanna Vanna Pookkal is represented with a fall arc structure. A fall arc depicts a character who begins in a stable or positive state but gradually deteriorates due to personal struggles, external conflicts or tragic circumstances. Rather than embracing love or a new life, she accepts her fate and succumbs to her tragic condition, marking a classic fall arc
- The women protagonists in Balu Mahendra's films display a diverse range of character traits, from emotionally dependent and shy to bold, independent and progressive
- Some characters share similar traits but manifest them in unique ways. Indumathi (Azhiyatha Kolangal), Thulasi (Marupadiyum) and Thulasi (Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam) are humble, supportive and emotional but differ in their expressions - Indumathi is respectful, Thulasi (Marupadiyum) is vulnerable and Thulasi (Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam) is shy
- Characters like Rekha (Moodu Pani), Sudha (Veedu) and Shenbagam (Vanna Vanna Pookkal) share traits of boldness, empathy and determination. Rekha is strong-willed to escape danger, Sudha is ambitious in building her home and Shenbagam is possessive in love
- Viji (Moondram Pirai) and Rosie (En Iniya Ponnillave) are naïve and kind, showcasing innocence - Viji has a childlike curiosity due to her condition, while Rosie, as a young pregnant woman, exhibits a childlike emotional dependence
- Radha (Rettai Vaal Kuruvi) and Priya (Sathi Leelavathi) are independent and self-made yet share the common trait of falling for married men
- Padma (Un Kannil Neer Vazhinthaal) and Manoranjini (Vanna Vanna Pookkal) are shy, reserved and dependent on their loved ones
- Kavitha (Marupadiyum) and Leelavathi (Sathi Leelavathi) struggle with insecurity and obsession over their partners, while Thulasi (Sandhya Raagam), Stella (Thalaimuraigal) and Gowri (Raman Abdullah) are practical and bold, approaching life with sensibility.

- Some characters have unique traits, such as Pazhani (Sathi Leelavathi), who brings humor and Julie (Julie Ganapathy), who is obsessive and mentally unstable to the extent of stalking an author
- The female protagonists in Balu Mahendra's films are depicted with a blend of strengths and weaknesses, making them multidimensional and realistic. They often showcase resilience, emotional vulnerability, trust, ambition and independence, but many also face naivete, dependence or emotional struggles. These character diamonds highlight the complex portrayals of women in cinema, moving beyond traditional stereotypes to present well-rounded personalities
- Understanding the character diamond, women protagonists such as Reka, Sudha, Thulasi, Gowri and Stella exhibit strength and independence, with Rekha, Sudha and Thulasi (Sandhya Raagam) showing boldness in handling tough situations. Meanwhile, Gowri and Stella's strength stems from their compassion and vision
- Women Protagonists such as Indhumathi, Radha, Padma, Thulasi, Manoranjini, Leelavathi, Rosie and Vijaya prioritize love, family and relationships, often at the cost of their independence. Indumathi, Padma and Thulasi (Rettai Vaal Kuruvi) struggle with naïveté and dependence on others, whereas Leelavathi and Manoranjini react strongly to betrayal and trauma
- Women Protagonists such as Viji, Thulasi in Marupadiyum and Adhuoru Kana Kaalam show personal development, learning from their experiences. Viji and Thulasi (Marupadiyum) undergo emotional shifts due to betrayal or trauma, whereas Thulasi (Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam) strengthens her identity through love and self-respect
- Totally 14 other female characters are prominently visible in Azhiyatha Kolangal's movie apart from the main protagonists. The other female characters are represented in traditional attire, primarily sarees, half-sarees, skirts and tops, with minimal makeup and simple ornaments. Hairstyles vary between braids and buns, often adorned with flowers. Their accessories include basic jewelry like studs, chains, bangles and anklets. Notably, dancers and the prostitute character wear slightly heavier makeup, including bright lipstick and kajal. The women in the film represent various societal roles, from students and villagers to family members and performers, emphasizing a culturally rich and traditional aesthetic

- Moodu Pani film features a diverse range of women portrayed through various social roles, from mothers and friends to sex workers and background characters. Most women wear sarees, while some appear in modern attire like frocks or jeans. Hairstyles vary - braids, buns and free hair are common. Makeup ranges from minimal (lipstick, kajal, bindi) to heavy in scenes involving sex workers or performers. Jewelry is typically modest (chains, stud earrings, bangles), though some characters wear more elaborate adornments
- The other women characters in Moondram Pirai are portrayed across a wide social spectrum from sex workers and dancers to mothers, helpers and everyday women. Attire ranges from traditional sarees to modern outfits (shorts, frocks, jeans). Hairstyles include buns, braids, ponytails and free hair. Makeup varies from minimal to heavy, depending on the role and accessories range from basic (studs, chains) to more flashy (coolers, bangles, headbands)
- The other women characters in Neengal Kettavai are depicted across various social, professional and cultural roles. Costuming ranges from traditional sarees and skirts to modern frocks, dance attire and even bikinis. Hairstyles include buns, braids, ponytails and free hair. Makeup varies by role from minimal (for background and traditional roles) to more vibrant and heavy (especially for performers and glamorous characters). Accessories also reflect this contrast, ranging from basic studs and chains to flashy bangles, loops and anklets
- Un Kannil Neer Vazhindhal film features a wide range of women characters, from traditional roles like mothers and villagers to modern characters like dancers, sex workers and foreigners. Costumes vary across sarees, half sarees, frocks, skirts, tops and bikinis. Hairstyles include braids, buns, ponytails and freestyles. Makeup ranges from minimal (bindi, kajal, lipstick) to heavy (especially for performers or specific character types). Accessories also range from none to ornate (bangles, chains, earrings, anklets, etc.)
- Women in Rettai Vaal Kuruvi are shown across a variety of social settings - homes, temples, weddings, work and public spaces. Most characters are dressed in traditional or modest modern attire and the styling is mostly simple and natural, with minimal makeup and light jewelry

- In *Veedu*, the women are primarily depicted in traditional roles, dressed in sarees with minimal makeup and modest accessories. The film focuses on realism, portraying everyday urban and middle-class life with an emphasis on simplicity and authenticity
- Since *Sandhya Raagam* is a black-and-white film, skin tones are not identifiable. The representation of women is rooted in realism and simplicity, with a strong emphasis on traditional attire, minimal makeup and limited or no accessories, reflecting both urban and rural Tamil life
- *Vanna Vanna Pookal*'s film presents a realistic cross-section of women from rural and semi-urban settings, using a mix of dark and fair skin tones, emphasizing traditional attire and maintaining minimalist makeup and accessories. The hairstyle, attire and makeup choices reflect the social status, profession and cultural context of each character
- *Marupadiyum* showcases women from diverse age groups and social strata from hostel girls to partygoers, servants, professionals and mothers. The characters' attire, hairstyles and accessories reflect their contextual roles education, domestic work, leisure or formal spaces while often maintaining a minimalist aesthetic in line with the film's grounded realism
- *Sathi Leelavathi*'s film reflects a mid-90s urban-rural crossover, where women appear in varied settings domestic, workplace, educational and social. The film balances traditional and modern aesthetics, with attention to skin tone diversity, hairstyle symbolism and accessory use based on character roles
- *Raman Abdullah*'s film reflects a multi-religious, class-diverse and regionally rich social setting. The female characters range across familial, institutional, religious and occupational identities. The styling distinctly separates urban-modern women from traditional and rural women, while accessories subtly mark class and cultural affiliations.
- *En Iniya Ponnilavae*'s film presents a wide range of women across social classes, professions and moral perceptions, from religious figures to sex workers, from nurses to Zumba participants each coded visually to mark their social standing, cultural identity and behavioral space

- In Julie Ganapathy, women are portrayed with a mix of dark and fair skin tones, where fair-skinned women are mostly seen in modern attire (jeans, salwars) with makeup and minimal accessories, indicating higher status or urban identity. Dark-skinned women are typically shown in traditional sarees or village settings, often with buns or braids and standard accessories like bindis, earrings and chains. Kids and young girls are dressed simply with minimal accessories
- In Adhu Oru Kanaa Kaalam, women are depicted across a range of social roles, combining both fair and dark-skinned representations. Fair-skinned women are often seen in modern or media-related roles (e.g., newsreader, dream actress), wearing stylish or minimal outfits with free hair and light makeup. Dark-skinned women typically appear in domestic or traditional roles - maids, mothers, teachers, temple-goers dressed in sarees with bun or braid hairstyles and traditional accessories like bindis, earrings and chains
- In Thalaimuraigal, women are portrayed across various roles and age groups with a blend of fair and dark-skinned representations. Dark-skinned women are often seen in traditional roles such as villagers, kids or random passersby, typically dressed in sarees or skirts with minimal or no accessories. Fair-skinned women are more commonly portrayed in professional or formal roles like doctors, receptionists and characters like Shakthi, wearing salwars or half-sarees with more stylized looks bindi, kajal, earrings, chains and bangles

5.3 Major Findings From In-Depth Interview

- All interviewees unanimously agreed that Balu Mahendra was a true auteur, combining the roles of director, cinematographer, screenwriter and editor, often controlling all aspects of the production himself
- His films were visually written, with a strong emphasis on natural light, realistic mise-en-scène and minimalist aesthetics. He was seen as a "visual poet" and "cinema university" by many
- Actors found working with him to be both transformative and educational. Many likened the experience to attending a film school

- His non-dramatic, naturalistic direction style required actors to be the character rather than perform. He emphasized subtlety, emotional truth and internal transformation over theatrical expressions
- He often acted out scenes for his actors, providing a deeply empathetic and grounded model of performance
- Balu Mahendra's female characters were central, complex and often the emotional spine of his narratives. They were drawn from real life, reflecting the struggles, dignity and strength of ordinary women
- His characters defied traditional beauty norms prioritizing real skin tones, natural makeup and authenticity over glamour
- Films like *Veedu*, *Moondram Pirai*, *Marupadiyum* and *Sathi Leelavathi* show that women were not mere romantic accessories, but fully realized individuals with depth and agency
- The actors observed a gender-neutral narrative approach. Characters regardless of gender were given importance based on their emotional and narrative significance, not screen time or star value
- Balu Mahendra avoided gender cliches and ensured emotional equality in his character arcs
- His cinema was deeply rooted in social reality. He depicted middle-class struggles, family bonds and moral dilemmas with honesty and sensitivity
- Films like *Veedu* were seen as universal representations of survival and aspiration, especially from a woman's perspective
- As a cinematographer, Balu Mahendra's work was considered revolutionary. His use of natural lighting, early-morning golden hour and minimal camera setups created emotionally resonant visuals
- He preferred simplicity in makeup and costume, relying on framing, mood and light to express emotional states
- His portrayal of themes like extramarital affairs was viewed as bold but responsible. Rather than sensationalize, he explored these issues with sensitivity, introspection and emotional depth

- Films such as *Rettai Vaal Kuruvi*, *Marupadiyum* and *Sathi Leelavathi* exemplified how he used controversial themes to trigger societal introspection, especially regarding marital dynamics and female autonomy
- Despite facing backlash for progressive portrayals (especially for actresses), the actors emphasized that critical acclaim and audience love outweighed negativity
- Balu Mahendra was praised for his unwavering faith in his cast, often giving actors career-defining opportunities and trusting their talent over industry bias
- His cinema institute and mentorship of young filmmakers reflect his lifelong commitment to nurturing talent
- He democratized filmmaking knowledge and was a source of inspiration for generations from the 1980s to today's new wave of Tamil directors
- The artists emphasized patience originality, craft and self-belief as essential for modern actors

5.4 Discussion

Balu Mahendra, one of the prominent Tamil Film directors & Cinematographer is also the most revered auteur. Through a meticulous ethnographic content analysis of his body of work in Tamil, particularly focusing on female protagonists, it becomes evident that his representation of women transcends the representative depictions often seen in mainstream Indian cinema. By analyzing these portrayals through the theoretical frameworks of auteur theory and representation theory, we gain insight into how Mahendra's personal vision, style and ideological leanings shape a unique cinematic language one that reconfigures gender representation in nuanced ways. Balu Mahendra, as a cinematographer-director, is often classified as a true auteur in Tamil cinema. His films exhibit a cohesive visual language marked by naturalistic lighting, minimal makeup organic sound design and subtle camera movement. This visual restraint is complemented by narrative realism characters are not superheroes or melodramatic figures but grounded individuals, often grappling with everyday socio-cultural constraints. When viewed through this lens, Mahendra's representation of women is deeply personal, reflective of his thematic preoccupations with identity, morality, love, solitude and psychological nuance.

To understand the perspectives of naming the characters, Recurrence and Symbolism in Women protagonists, it is found that the recurring use of the name "Thulasi" across multiple films (e.g., *Rettai Vaal Kuruvi*, *Sandhya Raagam*, *Marupadiyum*, *Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam*) suggests a symbolic or archetypal representation. Rather than being purely coincidental, this recurrence may reflect Mahendra's tendency to construct a central feminine archetype - a woman at the end of emotional, psychological or moral transformation. In auteurist terms, this signals his repeated engagement with a particular kind of woman protagonist: complex, emotionally rich and morally introspective. Similarly, the titular character in *Julie Ganapathy* implies centrality and narrative ownership, an important departure from conventional Tamil cinema where female characters are often marginal to the male protagonist's journey. This insistence on female subjectivity aligns with Mahendra's authorial voice, which continually shifts the spotlight toward female experiences, internal worlds and conflicts.

Understanding the character representation. Balu Mahendra's women are not monolithic. His characters ranging from housewives, teachers and students to singers and social workers embody a wide spectrum of Tamil women. This diversity, as illustrated in the results of the study, underlines Mahendra's commitment to realistic representation rather than tokenistic inclusion. Even roles with minimal screen time reflect socio-cultural specificity, whether through dialects, costumes or physical attributes. Balu Mahendra's films actively construct representations of women that challenge dominant cinematic stereotypes. His frequent use of dark-skinned, tall, medium-weight women such as Archana, Revathi and Shobha eschews the industry's normative beauty standards. The physicality of his protagonists becomes a site of resistance, pushing against the commodification and exoticization of women in commercial cinema. Furthermore, most of his characters speak neutral or literary Tamil, reinforcing authenticity and accessibility. The rare instances of English usage (as in *Thalaimuraigal*) or regional slang (e.g., Pazhani in *Sathi Leelavathi*) are contextually grounded, serving narrative rather than ornamental purposes. Such linguistic decisions reinforce Mahendra's preference for substance over spectacle again a hallmark of auteur cinema.

The costuming of female characters often dominated by sarees, half-sarees and modest traditional wear enhances the film's authenticity. Even in urban settings, the attire maintains an aesthetic of restraint, avoiding the glamorization typically associated with female protagonists in Indian cinema. Characters like Archana, Revathi and Shobha are often dressed in minimal makeup and adorned with subtle jewelry choices that reflect Mahendra's realist attitude.

The analysis reveals a fascinating pattern in character arcs. The prevalence of flat arcs, where characters remain internally consistent and influence the world rather than being changed by it, is particularly significant. Characters like Indumathi (*Azhiyatha Kolangal*) and Stella (*Thalaimuraigal*) exemplify this type, showcasing emotional steadiness and ideological clarity. Conversely, characters with transformative arcs such as Viji (*Moondram Pirai*) or Thulasi (*Marupadiyum*) offer a different kind of narrative agency. These women evolve in response to trauma, betrayal or love, allowing Mahendra to explore psychological landscapes rarely afforded to female characters in mainstream cinema. The presence of positive arcs (e.g., Sudha in *Veedu*) and fall arcs (e.g., Manoranjini in *Vanna Vanna Pookkal*) suggests that Mahendra does not shy away from portraying moral or emotional decline, especially when it serves the story's thematic seriousness.

The higher presence of housewives among the protagonists may, at first glance, appear to reinforce traditional gender roles. However, a deeper reading reveals a consistent interrogation of domestic life, often portraying it as a site of conflict, negotiation and introspection. For instance, *Marupadiyum* doesn't just show a wife's suffering but her journey toward self-discovery post-divorce. Films like *Veedu* center on women navigating structural obstacles (housing, bureaucracy), subtly foregrounding how public systems marginalize female agency. *Sathi Leelavathi* blends comedy with social commentary, highlighting marital neglect and body image issues through a humorous yet insightful lens. Moreover, characters like Radha (*Neengal Kettavai*) and Priya (*Sathi Leelavathi*) complicate the stereotype of the "other woman", showing emotional depth rather than vilification. These portrayals echo representation theory's assertion that characters gain

authenticity when they reflect a multiplicity of lived experiences rather than serving as moral signposts.

The predominance of urban settings (over 70%) in Mahendra's films signals an engagement with modernity and shifting social values. However, when rural settings are used (e.g., *Vanna Vanna Pookkal*), they are portrayed with equal complexity not as idyllic backdrops but as socio-cultural matrices influencing character's actions.

Hair, skin tone, body weight and height are not merely aesthetic choices but integral to character construction. Balu Mahendra consistently casts women whose appearances challenge or reflect the socio-cultural realities of Tamil Nadu. The presence of tall, medium-weight, dark-skinned women not often used in mainstream media demonstrates his commitment to authenticity over glamor.

The emotional range in Balu Mahendra's women is vast encompassing joy, rage, melancholy, desire and resignation. Characters like Viji (*Moondram Pirai*) and Julie (*Julie Ganapathy*) offer psychological depth rarely seen in Tamil cinema. Whether navigating mental illness, personal loss or societal judgment, these women are never reduced to exaggerations. Furthermore, the exploration of themes like emotional dependency, ambition, obsession and resilience showcases an auteur's attempt to probe the female psyche without overt dramatization. This restraint is a key feature of Balu Mahendra's cinematic voice, creating space for empathy and introspection. By embedding women at the emotional and narrative core of his films, Mahendra creates a cinematic universe where female subjectivity is not just present but pivotal. His legacy is not merely one of beautiful images or poignant storytelling, but of reshaping how Tamil cinema and its audiences see, understand and feel women on screen.

CHAPTER - 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, Balu Mahendra's portrayal of women stands as a profound departure from conventional Tamil cinema, offering instead a textured, empathetic and ideologically rich representation of female subjectivity. Through the consistent application of realist aesthetics, nuanced character arcs and a refusal to conform to industry beauty norms or narrative tropes, Balu Mahendra reimagines the role of women not as accessories to male protagonists but as central figures in their own right complex, resilient and emotionally intense. When viewed through the dual lenses of auteur theory and representation theory, his films emerge not only as deeply personal artistic expressions but also as cultural critiques that challenge and reshape dominant narratives of gender in Indian cinema.

6.2 Limitations & Recommendations of the Study

The study has been limited to only Tamil Films directed by Balu Mahendra. Since Balu Mahendra is also a renowned Cinematographer, the representation of women through the cinematographic lens can also be studied in the future.

Understanding Balu Mahendra as an auteur in constructing women characters, this study focused on character development and visual aesthetics. The representation of women characters concerning narrative structure, gender identity roles and social perception can also be incorporated.

The study has used only qualitative content analysis and studied the representation in films. A few artists who worked with Balu Mahendra are interviewed to support the study results.

Understanding the audience's perceptions of receiving Balu Mahendra's women representation would be much more useful to focus on the other side. The study can also be viewed through a feminist lens that is not done as a part of this study.

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APPENDIX 1

CODING PROTOCOL FOR ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTENT ANALYSIS (ECA)

Name of the Film	Name of the Director

Name of the Character	Name of the Protagonist	Category of Artist	Age	Religion	Occupation	Marital Status

Setting	Slang	Physical Appearance	Skin Tone	Height	Weight	Costume

Hair Style	Makeup	Ornaments	Attitude	Back Story	Number of Scenes	Character Arc

Character Diamond	Character Traits	Moral Values	Cultural Values	Role and Reflection

APPENDIX 2

BALU MAHENDRA FILMOGRAPHY (TAMIL)

S.No	Name of the Film	Date, Month and Year of Release
1	AzhiyadhaKolangal	7th December 1979
2	MooduPani	6th November 1980
3	MoondramPirai	19th February 1982
4	NeengalKettavai	28th June 1984
5	Un KannilNeerVazhindhal	14th June 1985
6	Rettai Vaal Kuruvi	27th February 1987
7	Veedu	25th November 1988
8	Sandhya Raagam	11th January 1989
9	VannaVannaPookkal	15th January 1992
10	Marupadiyum	14th January 1993
11	SathiLeelavathi	15th January 1995
12	Raman Abdullah	22nd August 1997
13	En Iniya Pon Nilave	11th May 2001
14	JulieGanapathy	1st February 2003
15	Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam	1st November 2005
16	Thalaimuraigal	20th December 2013

APPENDIX 3

SCREENSHOTS OF WOMEN PROTAGONISTS OF FILMS DIRECTED BY BALU MAHENDRA IN TAMIL

Azhiyadha Kolangal



Moodu Pani



Moondram Pirai



Neengal Kettavai



Un Kannil Neer Vazhindhal



Rettai Vaal Kuruvi



Veedu



Sandhya Raagam



Vanna Vanna Pookkal



Marupadiyum



Sathi Leelavathi



Raman Abdullah



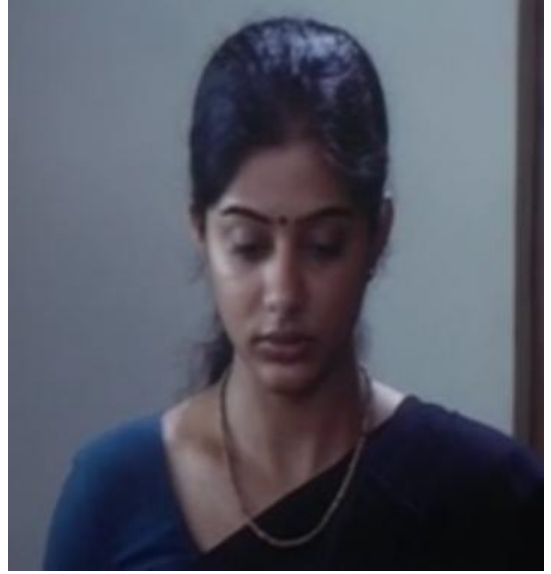
En Iniya Ponnilave



Julie Ganapathy



Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam



Thalaimuraigal



APPENDIX 4

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

1. How do you express yourself as an artist? Explain in a single word.
2. Who is your favorite director in the Tamil Film industry?
3. Who are your favorite women representations/Characters in Tamil Films?
4. Who are your favorite women characters in Balu Mahendra's Tamil Films, why?
5. Balu Mahendra as a director - Two unique qualities.
6. Please share your experience concerning Balu Mahendra as a director
7. How did you feel while acting in Balu Mahendra's Films?
8. Have you felt any importance of the role you played in Balu Mahendra's character?
9. How important are Balu Mahendra's women characters?
10. Did Balu Mahendra represent the reality of society in his Tamil Films?
11. Have you faced any obstacles during the film shoot
12. Have you got any appreciation/criticism for acting in Balu Mahendra's Tamil Films?
13. Have you learned any unique acting or performance inputs from Balu Mahendra as a director?
14. Which gender is given more importance in Balu Mahendra's Tamil Films?
15. What advice would you like to provide to the present artists in the Tamil film industry?

APPENDIX 5

PICTURES TAKEN DURING IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW WITH THE ARTISTS ACTED IN BALU MAHENDRA FILMS

Ms. Archana, Actress



Mr. Vignesh, Actor



Ms. Vinodini, Actress

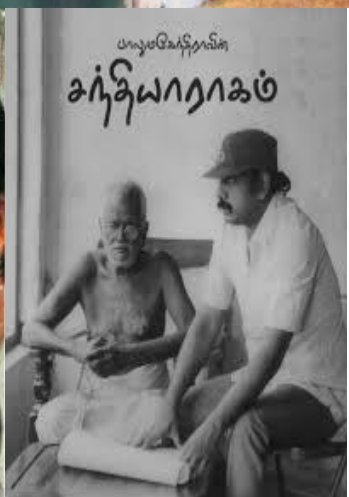
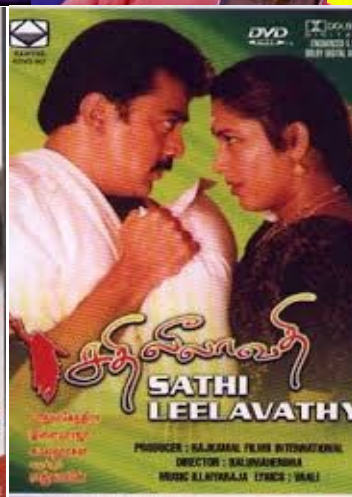


Mr. Pandiarajan, Actor & Director

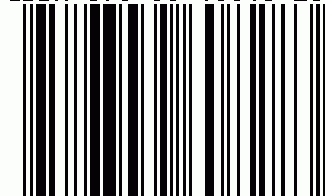


Mr. Ramesh Aravind, Actor & Director





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